

Uproot

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Uproot

by [lakegreen](#)

Summary

She saw a kindred spirit in him - someone who empathized like she could, someone who empathized with her. Across oceans and stretches of land and time, having never met her, Will Graham saw her and understood.

Fifteen years after Hannibal was incarcerated, he is living out his happily ever after. A place for everyone, and everyone in their place - until Hannibal and Clarice stumble into a gruesome discovery that twists their personal paradise into a private hell. To protect Clarice, Hannibal sets in motion events that will drag Will and Abigail into his grasp once again.

The Reach of Her Arm

Chapter Notes

*my love, i am the speed of sound
I left them motherless, fatherless
their souls dangling inside-out from their mouths
but it's never enough*

I want you...

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

August 31

I leave for school in two weeks. Mischa has been growing increasingly agitated and tense the closer we come to my departure date. I've tried to remind her that I've gone away before and she's survived, but she's grown too accustomed to having me at her beck and call over the long summer. During the past week her highs and lows have been extreme - one moment she's pleasant and charming, the next she is sour and resentful, accusing Robert and I for every wrong ever done to her.

Yesterday I suggested that we escape the city for a day and head out into the country, hopefully to cheer her up. She agreed, and we borrowed the car. Within half an hour in the fresh air and green sights, the cloud above her head disappeared. All day she was smiles and laughter, and we spent hours wandering the moors and woods, sketching birds and trees and landscapes. She was entranced with the warblers and songbirds - for every sketch I drew she produced ten far better than mine.

I know that she doesn't want to slip into her episodes, that she wants to be happy and inspired and carefree all of the time. It seems like these days she is only like that when we are together. It's difficult to watch her sink into anger and unrest. I know how brilliant she is at her best.

I try to be strong and supportive for her. The truth is, I dread returning to school. She is my only equal - I will miss her. More than she knows.

- Excerpt from the journal of Hannibal Lecter, age 17

It was incredible, how one incident, lasting for only a few seconds, could derail Hannibal Lecter's carefully composed life.

He had always been a patient man. He could wait a long time for the prey to stumble into his trap, for the pawn to fall to his rook. In prison, he had waited nearly eight years for Clarice Starling to show up - perhaps he had always been waiting for her, unknowing.

Clarice. She had not derailed him - she had set his course.

At first, she had been little more than an amusement - a young, pretty, poverty-born recruit with enough ambition and rage bottled within her that it threatened to consume her whole. He could see it flickering behind every downturned glance, see it in every diluted smile. He was curious about her. He wanted to see how far she would go. Then she shot Jame Gumb.

It is a brutal, alchemical transformation - the change from innocent to killer. Hannibal found it held the power to alter one completely - to reveal one's truest nature. The power to kill and rise above, to become godlike - when used properly, it could be euphoric, transcendent. Or it could devour you from within.

He had watched that transformation nearly destroy Will Graham, he had seen Abigail Hobbs pulled apart in her struggle between guilt and and exhilaration. He himself had grasped onto that power and used it to grow. Long ago, he had tried to give them an understanding of how they could master death to become better, more whole - complete. He had been rejected.

Hannibal wished he had been able to see Clarice after her first kill. He read what he could in the papers, seen what was available on television, but it was only a surface glimpse of the depths of Clarice's roiling psyche.

In the years that followed, it became clear that Clarice had not been destroyed by her transformation. She became much more than a curious amusement to him.

Killing Jame Gumb, for her, had been necessary - she did not struggle with this fact. She had to slay the wolf to protect the lamb. It was integral to her, to the very fiber of what made

Clarice, Clarice - her dogged determination to seek justice for the victimized. It was what had first sent her to his little cage - it was how they were together, here, now. *The world will not be this way within the reach of my arm.* Those words had come to her, and she had decided to free him from the clutches of Verger.

For that, he was thankful. He found himself thankful for many things these days. He had patiently outlasted all of his petty tormentors, the rude and banal fools who had misjudged and roadblocked him for so many years, the wrongfully righteous and unenlightened. Those that had hated him and hunted him down were of no consequence any longer. They were now distant constellations in his life, softly illuminating the background of his history.

But Clarice. Clarice was the sun.

Still, he was grateful for those that had crossed his path, steering him into his rightful orbit.

He was thankful to Jack Crawford for, in his hubris, sending a trainee to question him.

He was thankful to Bella Crawford, for slowly dying of cancer, distracting Jack away from his cases at the FBI.

He was thankful to Paul Krendler, for so thoroughly victimizing his Starling at the Bureau, that she had become disillusioned with the whole institution.

He was thankful to Mason Verger, for bringing him back to the States, within Starling's reach.

He was thankful to Frederick Chilton, whose hunger for the limelight had forged that fateful transfer to Tennessee.

And truly, he was thankful for Will Graham - for proving, in the end, to be incorruptible. He was thankful that Will had stopped at nothing to put him in that horrible cell. That cell had given him the greatest gift he had ever received - the chance to meet Clarice Starling.

Clarice, who had turned her office in their villa into an investigation war room. Crime scene photos, victim profiles, maps with pinpoints where bodies had been found - he had thought these things were long behind him, relics of a past self. Yet it was these relics that he now found Clarice pouring over, rereading every line, retracing every route. Here she had gathered every shred of proof she could find, creating a cocoon of murder and death, in which she hoped to metamorphose evidence into clarity and justice.

Apparently, you could take the girl out of the FBI - but you never could take the FBI out of the girl.

Hannibal stood in the doorway, undetected, sipping his wine as he observed her.

He did not want to interrupt. Currently she stood, studying her map, each point of interest marked with a pin, attached to the photographs that TattleCrime had leaked.

Hannibal loved to watch her work. Truly, this was Clarice in her element - her eyes narrowed as she inspected each scrap of evidence, her tongue peeked between her lips when she was deep in thought, she ran her hands through her hair when she came to a dead end. It was an

exquisite display. He wondered if this was how she had looked as she had investigated him, trying to track him down before Mason Verger did. He felt a violent surge of jealousy for those who had witnessed her beauty while he had been in exile, halfway around the world.

“Are you going to pour me a glass, or is the vintage too valuable to share?” Clarice asked, without turning to confirm his presence.

“There is nothing in this world too valuable that I wouldn’t hesitate to throw it into the sewer, if you asked it of me,” he replied.

She turned to him, and briefly he caught a glimpse of her unfocused vision, darkness swirling beneath her pupils. It was a look he had not seen in her eyes for many years. It disappeared quickly as she grinned at him, her eyes narrowing.

“Flatterer,” she intoned, approaching him. “And a liar.”

He did not bother to contradict her as she took the glass from his hand, and took an appreciative sip. She met his eyes and downed the rest of the glass in one gulp, her eyes glinting - a test. Determined to pass, he made no comment on her crass behavior.

Clarice grinned up at him, and rewarded him by folding herself neatly into his arms.

“Thank you,” she said into his chest. He pressed his lips into her hair. “I needed that. I could use three or four more of those, to be honest.”

He hummed, stroking her hair.

“Perhaps you would prefer to confide in me, rather than the bottle. I promise I am a better conversationalist.”

“You’d be surprised with how pleasant company bottles can keep,” she muttered, then pressed her lips to his neck. “They’re very good at keeping secrets.”

“And do you have a need to keep secrets from me, Clarice?”

He put his hands on her arms and pulled away, so that he could look into her eyes. The darkness was back - she looked through him and beyond him.

Clarice blinked, refocusing her vision and meeting his stare.

“Yes... No. No, of course not. I just... I just wish that you were on the same page with me on this. I know you want me to just block it out. It doesn’t concern us. And you’re right. But I can’t.”

She turned from him and paced back to the wall, lost again to the web of blood and death.

He studied her back, the stern set of her shoulders, the soft line of her hips. He wished that she could become more than flesh and bone, become truly immortal, made of silver and iron - that she could cross oceans and right all the injustices committed by her wretched tormentors,

and return back safely to him. But she was no avenging angel - as beautiful and deadly as she was, Clarice was still only human, bound by the constraints of mortality.

Clarice, who had now given herself wholeheartedly to a murder investigation she had no chance of closing. She did not have all of the pieces, did not have access to all of the information. Her arm did not reach from Buenos Aires to Quantico.

“He has to make a mistake, or they’ll never catch him,” she said, mostly to herself. “There’s no evidence to lead them to his safe house. The trail is broken.”

She traced over the map with her hand, index finger lingering over a scrawled red circle in southern Michigan. She had assembled this wall in the past two weeks, right after she had seen the face of the latest victim in the news. He knows the thoughts she is chasing from her mind - *if only I had the resources available to me at the Bureau, if only I were not a fugitive, if only I could travel freely in the States...* But none of those options would ever be open to her, ever again. She had made her choice.

Hannibal would not, could not interfere with her obsession, but he could see it eating away at her - watching the the FBI run in circles, while having crucial information that she had no way to communicate to the authorities without exposing them both.

“You punish yourself for situations beyond your control. But we are partners now - your suffering is mine to bear as well, Clarice. My warnings to you are not empty words - I cannot watch you become consumed with vengeance for crimes not committed upon you.”

She turned to him, giving him a thousand ton stare. Within it he saw anger, resentment, trust, love - and pity. To her, there was no separation between her and the victims pinned across her wall. She pitied him for not connecting to the anguish of strangers, like she could.

“Then maybe you won’t have to watch much longer,” she said.

Hannibal heard the threat in her words. He gripped her shoulders, gently locking her body to his.

“Clarice. It’s not safe for you to return. You go back, and those that you ran from will catch up. They will find you. They will lock you up far, far away from me. Would you really choose the path of vengeance, over a life with me?”

Her eyes softened, focused on his. Warm nights spent drinking champagne on their rooftop, gazing out at the glittering city below them. His gentle instructions as he teaches her the tango in their dining room. The pressure of him deep inside her as they share the same breath, as she digs her fingers into his back. This is what she would have to give up.

She collapsed back into him. Her arms reached around to grip him, vice-like. He returned the embrace, cradling her against him.

“I’m lost, Hannibal,” she whispered.

“You have everything you need to find yourself again, in here,” he kissed her forehead. “You can use me as your guide. But I doubt you truly need to. You know who you are, Clarice, and where you belong.”

She nodded, her grip loosening, her body staying close to his.

“I’m going to the attic for a while, I need to clear my head,” she said, drawing away from him at last.

‘The attic’ was what she called her memory palace (she had always hated that term), although it functioned just like his own. Hers was smaller, more functional than aesthetic, but it grew every day. Often, he followed her there, and they built it together - but not today. Today she needed her solitude. He nodded.

“Find me when you come back. I’ll prepare dinner.”

After she left the room, he remained, inspecting her work station. Truthfully, he would rather be taking her to the Teatro Colón tonight, or discussing literature, or engaging in anything that would bring delight to Starling. But if she needed to retreat for now, he would let her. He knew better than to get between Starling and her quarry.

At one point in his life he would have admired the work of this killer, perhaps he would have even sought him out - but now his handiwork seemed banally Freudian, trivial and pointless. Barely worth anyone’s attention - least of all his or Clarice’s.

Strewn across the desk were a laptop and several folders, bursting with leaked investigation reports and photographs. Something caught his eye - a corner of a newspaper article peeked out from one of the folders, and the fragment of the picture attached to the article struck at his memory. He pulled it out, and realized why it called to him.

The picture was of Will Graham. He was haggard and angry, glaring at the camera as he shielded someone behind him from the photographer. The figure behind him was Abigail Hobbs. They stood outside of the courthouse where his trial had been held - a long, drawn out circus of a prosecution. The headline screamed - *ABDUCTEE OR ACCOMPLICE? THE TRUTH ABOUT WILL GRAHAM AND ABIGAIL HOBBS REMAINS ELUSIVE.*

He laughed softly at the article that followed, full of inaccurate details and outlandish extrapolations that were far from the truth. If only the author of this drivel could have ever comprehended the murky and gray actuality - far from the black and white reality suggested by the headline.

Hannibal flipped through the rest of the folder’s contents, each piece about Will Graham, curious as to why Clarice had compiled this collection. Most of them were from Hannibal’s arrest and trial. Will had no connection to the current case, had not been involved in any casework since Dolarhyde had cut up his face. Then, he reached the final article in the folder - the author of which was Will Graham himself.

It was about Clarice.

THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF INCOMPETENCE: How sexist internal politics let Hannibal Lecter escape from under the FBI's nose.

Hannibal sat down and read the entire piece, word by word.

It was startlingly accurate. Will defended Clarice for her actions in the Bureau, up until her disappearance. He berated the FBI for allowing Paul Krendler to become as corrupt and powerful as he had. It was an extremely compelling piece of writing.

He understood now why Clarice had added information about Will Graham to her stockpile. She saw a kindred spirit in him - someone who empathized like she could, someone who empathized with *her*. Across oceans and stretches of land and time, having never met her, Will Graham saw her and understood.

Pieces of a plan began to click together in Hannibal's mind. He would use whatever resources necessary to keep Clarice from being consumed alive by her dead-end investigation - and now, he realized he had more tools to use than he had thought.

First, he needed to remember.

He retreated to his own memory palace now, to a room where he kept a copy of a particular recollection. It was of the events that had set off Clarice's obsession. He did not dwell on this memory as often as she did - but if he could find something there, anything that might help Clarice - he had to take another look.

It was supposed to be a brief trip back into the States - they were to retrieve some cash and a new set of ID's that he had stowed in one of his drop boxes. Starling had already been anxious about returning to her native soil, and so they stayed deep under the radar. She had convinced him to forgo his usual comfortable arrangements, and instead squat in abandoned vacation homes across the Midwest. He agreed that it was very discreet. At first, it was thrilling - wearing the clothing of their unknowing patrons, drinking their wine, browsing their libraries - they felt like rebellious teenagers, skirting on the boundaries of the law.

It was on the southern edge of Michigan where everything changed.

Hannibal found himself in their beat-up pickup truck, Clarice at the wheel, just as it had been that night. They had already found a cabin deep in the woods, apparently unoccupied, where they would stay for the night. Clarice was now pulling off the road, into some bushes in the woods - about a half mile away from the cabin, just in case someone might see the car and become curious. It was well concealed, and they could easily find their way back for a hasty escape.

It was a short, cold hike to the cabin; Hannibal felt the dry twigs crunch under his feet, the crisp November air bite at his skin. They were practically on the front porch when they heard the roar of an engine, and saw distant headlights filtering through the trees. Clarice quickly pulled Hannibal into cover, just as an SUV hurtled down the gravel road and stopped right in front of the cabin.

They stood, frozen, in the woods, waiting for the occupant of the SUV to retreat into the cabin so that they could make their escape.

What happened next would be seared, permanently, into Clarice's memory.

A man of average height and broad shoulders emerged from the driver's seat. He was not particularly striking - he had no distinctive features, and was overwhelmingly average in appearance. What was striking was the creature he then pulled from the trunk, and cradled in his arms.

Long, gleaming blonde hair poured from the girl's head, and hung over the man's arm. Her head hung slack, and she wore little more than a nightgown. Her face, peaceful and serene, was like the portrait of a sleeping angel. Her pale limbs dangled in the air, bobbing gently as he carried her into the house.

They didn't know it at the time, but soon enough, that girl's face would be staring up at them from countless newspapers - the latest victim of the serial killer the papers called Dracula.

Hannibal and Clarice had encountered enough dead bodies to know one when they saw one. She turned to stone beside him, and then he felt her jerk towards the cabin.

"No, Clarice. It may not be what it looks like," he whispered to her, wrenching her back towards him. "We are in no position to get involved. We have to turn back now."

She did not move, eyes locked onto the cabin door, behind which the man and the girl had disappeared.

"Now, Clarice," he said, and the tone of his voice told her he would not repeat the instruction again. She turned to him.

"Something's not right in there, Hannibal. I know it isn't."

He pulled on her, but she wouldn't move. She stared at him, her eyes brimming with tears.

"She's right you know. There is something very wrong going on in that cabin."

Hannibal spun around to face the source of the voice. *He* wasn't supposed to be here.

"You had him right there, and you let him go," Will said, his gaze piercing straight through Hannibal. He stood among the trees, as though he had always been there.

"I had to," Hannibal spat at him, "I couldn't risk getting involved. *We* couldn't risk it."

Will laughed at him, and began to walk away.

"We had him right there, and we let him go," Clarice whispered next to him. Will continued to laugh, and sank into the forest.

"Will," Hannibal called after him, "*Will!*"

"Hannibal."

A hand on his arm startled him out of the past, and dragged him into the present. Next to him, the current, material Clarice stood looking over him, a concerned expression on her face.

"Hannibal. *Hannibal* - are you alright?" she asked, smoothing his hair away from his forehead. "You looked like you were having a nightmare. You never have nightmares."

He collected himself, kissed her fingers.

"I'm sorry, I'm fine. I was just lost in thought," he said, and she climbed into his lap, nuzzling his neck.

"You were muttering to yourself. It sounded like you were saying *will*. Will what?"

"Will Graham," he said into her palm. There was no point in lying. "I found your folder. I was thinking about him."

She whipped her hand away from him, gasping in mock scandal. Her eyes glittered with mischief.

"Oh - so you were dreaming about an old lover - *calling out his name*, even!"

Still, she straddled him as she scolded him, and began to unbutton his shirt. Hannibal gripped her hips, working his hands under her shirt.

"I wasn't dreaming. I was remembering - and thinking. About you. You seem refreshed from your trip to the attic - cleared your mind?"

Clarice pulled back, running her hands through his hair as she searched his eyes.

"For now. I refocused on what is important to me."

"As did I," he returned. She met his eyes and the affection he found there sparked a fire deep inside his center.

"You never met Will Graham, did you?" he asked. She shook her head.

"No, I tried to get an interview with him for my investigation, but he had disappeared. No one could tell me where he had wound up after Dolarhyde. It was pretty clear that he didn't want to be found."

Hannibal hummed in thought, and leaned in to kiss Clarice. She kissed him back, eager and hungry.

"Would you like to meet him?" Hannibal asked, as they broke away to breathe. She laughed against his lips.

"You ask like it could *ever* be a possibility," she said. She lurched back in to kiss him again, but he turned slightly, and her mouth landed on his chin. Dejected, she glared at him.

"I think you two would get along. He's quite a bit like you. And a bit like me. But wholly and completely himself. He would definitely be fond of you," Hannibal said.

Clarice rubbed her thumb on the back of his neck, surveying him coolly. She always did know when he was up to something.

"Hannibal, if you want to invite a third party into our bed, all you have to do is ask. I know you're no stranger to the concept. And I would certainly be open to such an arrangement, if the situation was right."

He started to laugh, but was cut short as she attacked him, mouth ravenous and unforgiving. Her body ground against his, her hand pressing against the growing hardness between his legs. Hannibal shifted, reaching up under her skirt - but she swiftly pinned his arms against the chair, trapping him beneath her.

"I assume you wish to skip dinner and go straight to bed then?" he breathed into her ear. She smiled against his cheek.

"When I'm done with you, you won't even *dare* to think about someone else."

Hannibal accepted her challenge by thrusting upwards into her. She gasped, releasing her grip to wrap her arms around his head as she pressed her wetness against him. His hands found her panties and he pulled them down, caressing her rear.

Clarice moaned beautifully into his mouth as they kissed, and he was done with their playful fumbblings in the armchair. He lifted her up, and carried her to their bedroom. Once inside, he dropped her onto the bed, where she shed her clothes, tossing them onto the ground.

He marveled at her body, sleek and poised, open and waiting for him. His Starling. He melted into her, his body fitting into hers perfectly. Their limbs aligned effortlessly, each movement creating sparks of pleasure under his skin. Clarice lived up to her threat - she sent all of his senses reeling, his mind intoxicated by her scent.

She would never cease to surprise him, infuriate him, excite him. He would do anything to keep her here with him, like this - alert and engaged, not swallowed up by guilt and helplessness.

Hannibal knew what he had to do. If he and Clarice could not go to the FBI with their information, he would use a trusted messenger to go to them. The FBI was indebted to Will Graham for helping them catch Frances Dolarhyde.

Clarice slept beside him, serene. For tonight at least, she would not be plagued by visions of mutilated girls with angelic faces. Briefly, he remembered watching Will sleep - in their cottage, he had been undisturbed by his usual nightmares. How fleeting their time together had been.

When he closed his eyes, he imagined he would open them again to find Will resting on the other side of Clarice. He could already smell the other man - the cheap aftershave, the dirt

from his boots, the sweetness of his skin. Hannibal took a deep breath. He cleared his lungs then opened his eyes, dispersing the vision of Will.

He was getting sentimental in his old age. Will would be useful, yes - but he need to stay focused, and not get caught up in his desire to once again be face to face with the other man. No bars between them. To be able to reach out and touch him. To witness what kind of man he had become.

If Hannibal pulled the right strings, sent the right signals - Will Graham would come to him. It had been far too long since he'd last laid eyes on him.

He would need Clarice's help organizing the lure. Some of the plan she might find quite to her tastes.

Will and Clarice, together. He smiled at the thought. Soon enough, he would sculpt his vision into reality.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading! Next chapter catches up with Will and Alana, and how they've dealt with the aftermath of Red Dragon and Hannibal, leading up to what devious plans Hannibal has in store for them...

Lyrics from This Tornado Loves you by Neko Case.

Some Damned Martyr

Chapter Summary

After it all, Alana and Will forge a new life together - but old cuts run deep.

Chapter Notes

*now that we've met
we can only laugh at these regrets
common as a winter cold
they're telephone poles
they follow each other
one. after another, after another*

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

September 15

Dear Mischa,

I'm sorry our conversation got cut off. I wish we could have more time, but the restrictions here are the same for everyone. I hope my letters will be enough between calls.

What I wanted to tell you was that you should not fear being sent away like Aunt Sophia. Robert would never send you to some cement brick institution, isolated from those that care about you. He wants to protect you. You think he's strict, but he loves you - as do I. He keeps you in London with him to watch over you, which is what I agree is best. We both remember what happened when he sent you away to Saint Marie's.

Be patient with him. Even I struggle to keep up with you sometimes. You are unique - you shine brighter than most, and thus your darkness is deeper. It is not something to be ashamed of, and it is nothing you should be afraid of.

You are not insane. Take Robert's suggestion of a therapist to heart. I think it would be a good idea - to find someone to ground you when you find yourself slipping.

Take care of yourself, Mischa. I am always thinking of you.

- H

Alana Bloom had stopped waiting for stability, for all the pieces of her life to fall perfectly into place. All hope of stability had been erased the moment she had met Hannibal Lecter, although it had taken him nearly a decade to completely throw her life out of orbit.

She had lost Will Graham too many times. Once, to the mental hospital. The second time, he had disappeared from his hospital cell, only to turn up as Hannibal's captive. After the trial, she lost him to Florida. By the time he showed up in Quantico to help Jack catch the Tooth Fairy, Alana was days away from being served divorce papers, and Will had a wife and stepson.

When the case was supposedly closed, she had lost him again to his new family, his new home - only to hear that Dolarhyde had sunk a knife into his face while trying to kill said family.

Months later, Will Graham, new scar barely healed, appeared on her doorstep.

Alana didn't hesitate. She'd already lost so much time.

She wrapped her arms around him, gently kissed his mouth, the uninjured side of his face. He leaned into her and sighed, holding her as close as he possibly could. Then his body turned to stone, and he pulled away from her.

"I'm sorry, I didn't expect - I didn't come here for this. You don't have to do this," he said, avoiding her eyes. She didn't let go of him.

"Molly? Willie?" she asked. He held up a bare left hand with a grim smile.

"Left me. She took him up to live with his grandparents," he said, then shook his head.

"Look, that's really not why I came out here, I don't want you to get the wrong idea - "

She still didn't let go of him, and took his hands in hers.

"Tell me what the right idea is, then. Why did you come here?" she asked gently. He met her eyes - she could see he was lost, so lost.

"I don't know," he said with a shrug. "I just wanted to see you."

Alana kissed him again, and this time he did not pull away. With one hand, she reached behind her and opened her front door, pulling him through it.

For all that had happened, for all the time they had been apart, Will still tasted the same. They didn't make it out of the foyer. She clasped him to her, kissing him with a frenzied compulsion, as though he would slip from her grasp at any moment. He responded in kind, lifting his shaking hands to her head, burying them in her hair.

At last, they separated, foreheads still pressed together, as they sucked in gulps of air. Will had stopped shaking. His eyes were still closed as she studied him - underneath the crinkled lines of stress and age, he looked impossibly vulnerable. Then he opened his eyes, and looked back into hers - and they were kissing again, slow and patient, lips and tongues gently seeking solace in the other.

They were interrupted only when Lizzy, her great Dane, greeted them with a thunderous round of barking. Alana laughed into Will's mouth.

"Sorry - Will, meet Lizzy, Lizzy meet Will."

Will and Lizzy were instantly old pals. He played with her and rubbed her belly, and she gleefully licked his face. Alana observed their antics, laughing as Lizzy slobbered all over Will, and went to the kitchen to make coffee.

When he approached her in the kitchen, wiping dog drool off his face, the stony and reserved Will had returned.

"I'm sorry to hear about you and Jacob," he said, voice flat. She sent him a withering look.

"Don't be. It was never going to work out," she replied.

Jacob had been everything a mother would wish for her little girl - handsome, a doctor, respected and established. She had married him because she was approaching forty, and she had thought it was what she should do - move on. Settle down. Start over.

It turned out she didn't want to settle down or move on. She had ignored his complaints that she wasn't focused on their relationship, that she was too distant and distracted - all of which were true. A week after Will arrived in DC for the Tooth Fairy investigation, Jacob had filed for divorce.

"It was a mistake from the beginning - I thought he was what I wanted, but I was wrong," Alana said. *He wasn't you.*

Will clenched his jaw, and pressed his palm between his thumb and forefinger, rubbing it. A nervous tick she had not seen before. Behind his eyes a thousand words seemed to be filtering themselves, until he found the right ones for what he needed to say.

"Look," he said, "Take a good look at my face Alana - and not just the good side." Her eyes found his scar, traced over every inch of it. "Dolarhyde didn't do this alone - he was sent to me, like a deadly gift, by our old friend. He almost killed me, and Molly and Willie, for refusing to return his phone calls. I'm bad news Alana, I'm messed up beyond salvaging. I shouldn't have come here. I can't promise I'll ever be good enough for you. You deserve better than this, than me."

Alana sighed, and fixed him with a stern glare as she chose her words.

"You don't get to choose what I deserve, Will Graham. There's a lot of things that I deserve, that I will never get - like a life without Hannibal Lecter deciding what we can or cannot do from behind bars. I don't deserve that, and neither do you. I'm done waiting for everything to be perfect - nothing will ever line up just right for us Will, it's time we stop fooling ourselves. So don't talk to me like some damned martyr. I don't know what I deserve - but I do know what I want. I hope you figure out what you want, too, Will."

She handed him a cup of coffee, and they sat in silence for a long time, while she fumed and let her cup grow cold.

"I'm sorry," he said at last, and meant it.

"Apology accepted," she said. She reached across the table to take his hands - they were rougher, more calloused now than she remembered them, thanks to years of repairing boat motors. But they were still Will's. She would recognize them anywhere. When she looked up, she felt tears spring into her eyes.

Across the table, Will smiled at her - a true, authentic Will Graham smile. Few people ever saw one - it had been years since she'd seen one herself.

"It's funny," he said, still smiling at her. "How we both made the same mistake at the same time."

He rubbed her bare ring finger, then interlaced her fingers with his. She choked back her tears, and took a deep breath.

"Come to bed?" she said. It was an inquiry and a command.

He nodded, and followed her up to her bedroom. He knew he'd follow her anywhere.

And he did. He followed her all the way out west, to Boulder, Colorado. They had no connections, no friends, no family - they were an island to themselves. It was exactly what they wanted. Alana taught psychology at the local university, and Will mostly stayed at home, tending to their growing collection of animals and occasionally writing. After the trial, against Will's lack of vindictiveness, Jack had persuaded him to sue the FBI for false imprisonment - Will had walked away with a generous settlement. From what Alana had gathered, he had given the majority to Abigail.

He had no financial need for a full time career. Eventually he published a book on criminal profiling under a pseudonym, and he made a tidy sum from the advance and the royalties. Most of it he donated, some of it he kept to manage their affairs. They lived a simple life, and never wanted for much.

Will wrote to Abigail on a weekly basis, and went out to Maine to visit her every few months. They formed a book club of two, alternating book choices and discussing their notes in their emails. Abigail had lived with Will for a while, during and after Hannibal's trial; then she had grown up, like young people do, and moved out on her own. Alana knew little of how she

lived her life - just that she and Will were still very close, and he told Alana that she was doing well.

Their life together had not started smoothly, as Will had predicted. But Alana was patient - and she loved him. Eventually, they found there were few things they could not work through together.

This was put to the test the night Hannibal Lecter escaped.

Jack called them in the middle of the night. As soon as Alana heard the phone ring, she knew - it was Hannibal. And it was bad news.

Will overheard Jack telling her on the phone - Hannibal had escaped from custody, killing two police officers, three EMT's, and one tourist in the process. Her body went numb. Will was very quiet. Jack sounded defeated and hollow.

She wanted to scream at him, *How could you have let this happen? You had him, and you just let him go! How could you do this to me, to Will?*

The words wouldn't come. She let out a choked sob, and then hung up the phone.

Will was already up. He pulled on his hiking boots, threw on his jacket, and he was gone.

She watched him wander into the woods from their front porch. She knew better than to try and call him back, or go after him.

Will wasn't gone for long. He was back in the morning, his clothes muddy, his knuckles cut and bloody, his voice raw - but he was back. He stripped out of his clothes right there on the foyer, and went upstairs. Alana made breakfast while he took a long, scalding hot bath.

Will returned to the kitchen, sat across from Alana in front of the eggs and toast she had laid out for him. He didn't touch the food, and looked right into her eyes.

"I won't let him win this time, Alana. I won't let his darkness consume me from the inside out. I refuse to live in fear."

"You don't think he'll come for you?"

"If he wants to find me, there is nothing on this earth that will keep him from doing so. I tried to run before. I tried to convince myself that I could start over with someone never touched by the violence of Hannibal Lecter - as if Molly's innocence could rub off on me. But it didn't matter. If he wants to insert himself into your life, he will, end of discussion. Alana, you're one of the few that truly understands the consequences of that. If he comes, we'll deal with him then, together."

We. Together. Alana let out a sigh of relief.

"Will, just promise me - and know that if you break this promise, you'll have far worse than Hannibal Lecter to contend with - promise me that you won't run off, thinking that you'll

keep me safe by abandoning me. Because I'm not afraid of him, Will - I'm only afraid that I'll wake up, and I won't know where you've gone."

He promised her. And he kept that promise. Life continued on for them, more or less as normal. They kept track of any news related to Hannibal, and Alana responded to all inquiries from the FBI, but they had not received any correspondence from the escaped killer. Hannibal Lecter related artifacts became collector's items. Every now and then someone would claim they'd spotted him in the Bahama's, or on the streets of Hong Kong. Nothing led to any concrete leads.

Years passed before he received a fateful phone call.

"Will - Jesus, kid, it's been way too long. Would it kill you to send a Christmas card or something?"

Beverly's voice instantly brought a smile to Will's face. She was one of a hand full of people that had his current contact information.

"Sorry Bev, you know how it is. Time flies."

"Yeah, yeah. How's Alana? Still haven't forgiven you for stealing her out west."

"I told you, she stole me. I'm the victim to her merciless ways. But I've adjusted, we're both doing very well," he said, Beverly's jovial attitude contagious, even through the phone.

"Hm. I'm glad to hear it, really glad. You deserve that," she said, and her tone of voice did a complete one-eighty, turning deadly serious. "Listen, I don't want to beat around the bush too long. One day we'll have to catch up over a few beers but today I need to tell you some important information. Do you have the rest of the day open? Because I'm gonna need your attention for a good block of time. And you're probably going to want to sit down."

There was only one topic this conversation could be on. Will closed his office door, and settled into his desk chair.

"What did you find?"

He heard a long sigh on the other end of the phone.

"I don't even know where to start. What we found was only the end of a bizarre chain of events that we're still trying to piece together. There are so many things that don't add up yet. Let's just get the worst out of the way. He was here. Practically at our doorstep - we found DNA evidence that he was on Muskrat Farm in northern Maryland. He killed Mason Verger."

Will remained quiet, slowly letting these facts click into place in his mind. There was no need to specify who she was talking about.

"When?" he asked.

"Two weeks ago. We've managed to keep it out of the press, buy us some time. But you deserve to know what's going on. I'm not even really officially on the investigation, just

consulting with forensics. Because there is a lot of forensics to be done. Really, really weird forensics. Will, I've never seen anything like this."

"Not even on the Chesapeake Ripper cases?"

"Not even on those. This stuff is sick, even for him. From everything I've looked at so far, it's pretty clear that Mason Verger was not the only one who died that night. But we'll be damned if we'll ever find out who they were. Something horrible took place in Verger's barn - we found every kind of body fluid imaginable, fragments of skin and bone and hair - and not just from one donor. We couldn't get a match on any of the samples, and there are no compatible missing persons reports. But we know that at least three men died in that barn. And not peacefully - they were ripped apart and devoured."

"By Lecter?"

"No. This is where it gets disturbing. We didn't find just human tissue samples. We found hair, saliva, urine and fecal matter from pigs. Gigantic, bloodthirsty, man eating pigs."

Beverly paused. Will knew it wasn't for dramatic effect. She was reliving what she had reconstructed from the evidence - the last gruesome moments of those unidentified men.

"And you found the pigs?"

"We found one in the woods nearby. Nearly took down an agent - he emptied his entire clip into the thing before it went down. It had human remains in its stomach. We haven't been able to find the others yet. Needless to say, this barn massacre complicates things. The worst part is that there's one more victim. Do you remember Clarice Starling?"

Oh yes, he remembered her. Jack's last resort at pulling information out of Hannibal. The former trainee who had found and shot Jame Gumb. He remained silent for a while, letting Beverly's implication of her fate sink in.

"What happened to her?" His question was barely audible, almost a whisper.

"She's disappeared. Vanished into thin air. She had been suspended from duty, but then her roommate reported her missing. Sure enough, we found trace amounts of her blood at the scene. Not as much as the other victims. We're still putting it together, but we don't think she was eaten like the others. She didn't die there. Why she was there in the first place, is what the Feds are trying to figure out now."

"She was there because Lecter was there. Why *he* was there is what they should be looking into," Will said.

Beverly paused, and Will could feel her skeptic consideration of this statement through the wire.

"But Will - how could she have possibly known he would be there? Unless they were collaborating. And he was there to kill Verger - which he accomplished."

Will knew all about Mason Verger and the gruesome business his family fortune was built on. His intuition churned on, making associations and connections at full tilt.

“Bev, the pigs were Verger’s creation. Bloodthirsty gigantic pigs? Nothing like that exists in nature. Dig deep enough and I’m sure they’ll find a trail of money linked to a breeding venture. Why was Starling suspended from duty? What was she working on at the time?”

“It’s all very hush hush, honestly. Listen, you didn’t hear this from me, but her supervisor Paul Krendler always had it out for her. He was always eyeing her up and down when he thought no one was looking. Him and his cronies set her up to fall. In fact, she was investigating Lecter at the time - although she had not indicated to anyone that she knew where he was.”

Will hummed to himself, the pendulum hovering at the edges of his vision as he pieced together the fragments of Beverly’s story in his mind. Gorging pigs, the vanished Starling, devoured men, crippled Mason Verger, conniving Paul Krendler...

“Ignoring the pigs, ignoring Starling - why would Lecter go back to kill Verger? I mean, you saw him. The state he was in. Lecter would have loved that - he wouldn’t risk exposing himself to go back and finish him off. That would be too kind. Follow the money, Bev. There’s some connection between Verger, Krendler, and that detective killed in Florence. I think Starling must have been on the verge of making that connection - if she hadn’t already. Look into her files. And I don’t think Lecter went to that estate willingly - I think Verger *brought* him there to torture him and feed him to the pigs. But something went wrong, clearly. Starling showed up.”

“Jesus Christ, kid,” Beverly breathed out into the phone. “You sure you don’t want to come back to the FBI? If anything you just said pans out - and I have a hunch that it will - you’re running in circles around us.”

“It’s just a hunch,” Will said, finding the corners of his mouth quirk upwards into a smile at Beverly’s breathless admiration. “When you follow the evidence, like I know you will, you’ll come to the same conclusions.” He heard her chuckle into the phone.

“The evidence, of course. Damn, Will. Honestly, I didn’t call for you to help *me*, I called to help *you*. To give you a heads up, to let you in on what’s going on. I didn’t want you reading about this in the papers and only getting half of the truth.”

“Thank you Bev, I really appreciate it. You have no idea.”

She promised to update him as the investigation progressed. Long after they had both hung up, Will found himself still in that barn, the pendulum swinging, each time recreating fragments of the gruesome events to follow.

With one more pendulum swing, he was outside the barn, watching Clarice Starling as she approached. Gun held at the ready, as natural as if it were an extension of her own arm. Eyes alight with the fires of anger and cunning. She was the snake beneath the flower, poised to strike, more dangerous to all those who belittled her.

As surely as he knew that Hannibal had been captured and brought to Muskrat Farm, he knew that Starling had come to rescue him. Ultimately, perhaps, to bring him into rightful custody - but outside that barn, her muscles and bones primed for a fight, all she could envision was preventing Hannibal from meeting a tortured death. Long ago, he had dismantled her and then lovingly, cruelly rebuilt her. She did not know what a world without Hannibal Lecter in it looked like for her - she didn't want to find out.

Will knew the feeling.

Three weeks later, Beverly called him again. An edge of horror remained in her voice as she debriefed Will.

"Paul Krendler went missing a week ago. We found him about two days ago," her voice stuttered to a stop. Will had to vocally prod her to continue. "His entire scalp was neatly sawed off. Just gone."

"Classic Ripper surgical precision."

"Exactly - that's the thing... the scalping didn't kill him. The crossbow bolt through his chest did. But not until... not until he'd had a little *fun*. Looks like he threw a little dinner party. There were knife cuts in his brain matter - chunks missing. Lecter *cut into his brain* while he was still alive. Probably conscious. And then... oh god, Will. We found Krendler's brain matter in his stomach. *Lecter fed him his own brain.*"

Dinner and a show, was Will's first morbid thought. He felt the hysteric laughter building in his chest, then quashed it.

"Sounds like a particularly humiliating display to amuse his audience with. I assume it was an audience of one."

Beverly was quiet, then sighed.

"There's no DNA evidence, it's all circumstantial. Brand new women's shoes - expensive Louboutins, Manolo Blahnik's - were found abandoned on the property. Everything suggests that there were place settings for two. And the choice of victim is quite personal, if who you're implying was his intended audience."

Will was suddenly overcome with nauseous delight. He could see the table, the extravagant place settings, the glisten of Krendler's cerebral fluids in the candlelight. *The corrupt and mindless Krendler, cut open and made a feast for Clarice, my Starling - so unjustly tormented by this fool. She alone deserves to see her enemies dismantled before her.*

Hannibal's interior narration began to suck him in, all-consuming. The black hole of his psyche was only disrupted by Beverly's voice.

"Will? Will, come back to me. I know you're reconstructing it in your head. Don't let him get to you. You're in control here."

He opened his eyes - he hadn't realized he had screwed them shut.

“They’re long gone, Bev. It doesn’t even matter what you find at the scene. Lecter killed Krendler, and you only found him because he wanted you to. He has Starling. And they’re both far, far out of your reach by now.”

“I’m sorry, Will. I’m sorry we lost her.”

The echo of Abigail’s abduction, mutilation, and brainwashing reverberated silently between them.

Beverly knew, that above Lecter’s escape, above Krendler’s murder, it would be the missing agent that would keep him up at night.

After this call, Will kept in touch with Beverly on a regular basis. When news of Krendler’s death reached the media, he kept tabs on every piece of information available to the public. Through Beverly, he called in every favor ever owed to him by his contacts at the FBI. From his inside sources, he gathered every piece of background that he could on Clarice Starling and Paul Krendler. Independently, he began to piece together the chain of events that led up to the massacre on Muskrat Farm.

The FBI’s mishandling of the whole ordeal was infuriating. After Starling’s disappearance, FBI officials had gone through her files, and found that she was startlingly close to proving Krendler was in Verger’s pocket, and that Verger had made payments on a bounty for Hannibal. If one competent person had been on Starling’s side, had backed up her case - then Hannibal Lecter could be behind bars at this very moment. Now everyone involved was either dead or as good as dead.

He told everything to Alana. She became his guide - she pulled him back up when he needed air, when he got too deep. The vanished Starling was never far from his mind - but Alana kept his head above the surface. When he started writing, she was his sole editor.

Will gathered his evidence, strung it together, and for the first time in over a decade, he published under his own name. He wrote up a scathing article, detailing the failures and ineptitude of the FBI that lead to the grisly incident on the Verger estate, the death of an agent, and the disappearance of another. It circulated like wildfire. Will was very careful to make sure his information was well hidden, or else he would have been bombarded by further inquiries about his thoughts on the FBI and the whereabouts of Hannibal Lecter.

The article was his catharsis. To preserve his sanity, to preserve the life he had built without Hannibal Lecter with Alana, he set it aside. They continued their lives - happily, peacefully, and without incident.

This was how Special Agent Ardelia Mapp found them three years after the Muskrat Farm incident, carrying a briefcase full of case files for an entirely new set of crimes.

Next Chapter: Ardelia Mapp brings some new evidence to the surface. Will and Alana reel in its wake.

Lyrics from That Teenage Feeling, Neko Case.

Memorize Every Piece

Chapter Summary

Ardelia Mapp has new evidence on the whereabouts of Hannibal Lecter - and he seems to be sending a bloody message to Will.

Chapter Notes

*oh, lie
I thought you were golden
I thought you were wise
when I caught you returning
to the house you caught fire
but I know that I was your favorite*

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

September 30

Every hour of my day is scheduled - wake up at eight, French at nine, Chemistry at ten, Classics at eleven - so on and so on until after dinner. Then it is piano lessons, study hour, and finally, a few hours of free time before bed. And the process repeats.

It is maddening, the rote repetitiveness of it. It's not that I find my classes uninteresting - they are the most enjoyable part of the day. But I am unable to delve deeper if I find something captivating - in a flash we are onto the next subject. There is no time to revel, to savour, to digest. We are expected to sit and swallow our lessons, and then to dutifully regurgitate our knowledge on command. It wouldn't be as bad if I had worthy company - but my classmates here are just as dull as school children anywhere. They sit and daydream through class until they are free for their rowdy and crude boyish games.

In Biology this week we are going to dissect a fetal pig. In preparation, we're reviewing diagrams of the pigs internal anatomy, and instructions on proper dissection procedures. My classmates puff and posture before each other, but I can see the fear in their eyes - the queasy uncertainty that they will not flinch when presented with the real thing.

I would be lying if I said I hadn't pictured, instead of a pig, one of them on the dissection table. A fantasy I have allowed myself - only once or twice.

- Excerpt from the journal of Hannibal Lecter, age 17

Will Graham was a difficult man to track down.

The myths and legends at Quantico had not made Ardelia Mapp's search any easier. The prevalent story was that he was currently a drunk, wasting away in southern Florida, permanently disfigured by Frances Dolarhyde. The traces of truth interwoven into this story made it a particularly believable one.

How could a man - framed for murder and then abducted by the most notorious serial killer of the century, then viciously attacked in his own home - ever integrate back into a normal life?

Ardelia had asked the right people the right questions. She suspected the rumors about Florida had been purposefully planted - to keep inquisitive minds from learning the truth. Fate, as it turned out, had been kinder to Will Graham than the myths proposed.

Ardelia had checked her facts, and followed them to Colorado.

The only way to get to Will Graham would be through Alana Bloom. Ardelia knew that she needed to approach her first - she had to be on Ardelia's side.

Ardelia now stood in the hall outside of her classroom, and waited for her seminar to be over. After the last undergraduate had trailed out, Ardelia approached Dr. Bloom, busy packing her bags.

"Dr. Bloom?" Ardelia said, stepping into the room. Alana looked up at her, a look of distrust flitted across her face, then disappeared as she tried to hide it behind a polite smile.

"Yes, how can I help you?" she said, not pausing as she shoved the last of the papers and books into her bag. She made steps towards the open door, as though to continue this conversation in the hallway, but Ardelia closed it behind her.

"I'm Special Agent Ardelia Mapp, from -," she said, pulling out her badge. Alana didn't bother to inspect it.

"The FBI," Alana finished for her, all politeness now gone from her demeanor. "If you came here to ask me a few questions, let's get it over with. I don't know what's happened now, but if I had any information, I'd have already been in contact with the Bureau."

"Actually," Ardelia said, unfazed by Alana's attitude. "I was wondering if you could do me a favor. I was hoping you could have Will Graham look at a few things for me. Not for the FBI, but for me, personally."

Alana dropped her bag back onto the desk, and leaned against it. She surveyed Ardelia Mapp, taking in her tidy appearance, her stern countenance, the premature grays mixed in along with her shiny black hair. She had the distinct look of someone who worked too hard, for too little reward.

"Interesting. Flashing an FBI badge and then asking for personal favors. It must be a very important favor, if you came all the way out here. Your intelligence is good, and you've used it well - if you need Will Graham, then I'm the only way you'll get to him. If you want him to look at something, you'll have to show me first."

Ardelia nodded, and placed her briefcase on the desk, clicking it open. She paused before she drew out the thick case file.

"I apologize in advance. These pictures will probably be quite... disturbing," she said. Alana's mouth drew into a tight line.

"I've seen my share," she said.

Ardelia pulled out a series of five photographs - and with each one, Alana felt as though a ghost had entered the room. Bile burned the back of her throat. As Ardelia placed the sixth photograph on the desk, Alana understood why she had come. Still, her throat closed up and the sting of rage boiled in her gut.

She would have to let Agent Mapp see Will. Sooner or later, he would find out about the victims in these photographs - and Alana was determined that she would be by his side when that happened.

"These do not come anywhere near our home," she said, still staring at the photographs. "I will convince him to meet with you, but I will not - under any circumstances - let you drag this into our house. He's - we've come so far. You're lucky I'll let you get within a ten foot radius of him."

Ardelia thanked her, and they exchanged contact information. The sharp edge of resentment cut through Alana as she shook hands with Ardelia, and watched her exit the room. She knew

Will would become too invested in these victims. They had not had enough time. For so long, Alana had lived under the delusion that the past would not catch up to them - but here the messenger had stood before her, delivering the death sentence to their new life.

Alana drove home in a blind trance. Will did not need much convincing to meet with Agent Mapp - so Alana arranged a meeting in her office on Saturday morning, when few professors or students would be roaming the university facilities.

Will Graham had aged fairly well, Ardelia thought, all things considered. His hair was still dark and thick, with no trace of gray yet, his frame thin but solid. He was solemn and grim, but not as stand-offish as she had heard he was - living with Alana Bloom had served him well. The scarring on his face was indeed dramatic - but he was not as damaged as the legends surrounding him at Quantico would suggest.

Alana and Will sat side by side behind the desk, and Ardelia took her seat in front, pulling the briefcase into her lap.

"Thank you for meeting me. You don't know how grateful I am for your time," she began. "So I want to be completely honest with you. Dr. Bloom, I mentioned that this was a personal request. I know you don't want to drag up long-buried history, but I believe we share a common goal."

"Which would be?" Will said, voice flat and emotionless.

"To put Hannibal Lecter behind bars," Ardelia replied. At this, Will raised his eyebrows, but his eyes gave away nothing.

"And why is this personal to you, Agent Mapp?" he asked.

From her wallet, Ardelia pulled out a photograph - she and Clarice at their Academy graduation, beaming, arms draped around each other. She pushed it across the desk, where Will picked it up, examining it.

"I read your article, Mr. Graham. Clarice Starling was my best friend - I was the roommate who reported her missing. You... I don't know how you wrote about her so accurately. I really couldn't believe it when I read it - you described her predicament with astounding clarity. I've wanted to talk to you ever since, but I didn't have anything to offer. And you weren't easily contacted. So I've been digging up what I can.

"I know Lecter's history with Abigail Hobbs. And I know he had a fascination with Clarice. I don't think she disappeared into thin air, and I don't think she's dead. I know he took her - and I think he still has her. I want her back."

The hardness behind Will's eyes softened, and he handed her back the photograph.

"How do you think I can help you with this?"

Ardelia leaned forward, eyes intense and determined, her hands clutching the briefcase in her lap.

"The FBI won't do anything - they don't care about Clarice or Lecter anymore, the whole thing has been an embarrassment for them - and they aren't eager to chase down dead ends. And for a while, that was all I had. Until now."

Ardelia extracted the folder from her briefcase, and pushed it across the desk. Will reached out and pulled it towards him. Alana looked away - she didn't need to see those faces gazing up at her again. Slowly, Will flipped through them - and it was clear why Mapp had come to him.

There were six victims - all men, the method of each crime strikingly different from the last - but each intimately familiar to Will.

The first was impaled upon antlers still connected to a stag's head, his skin picked at by scavenging birds. The second was mounted on a wall display of antlers in what appeared to be a hunter's lodge. The third had had his face sliced open, deep gashes extending from the corners of his mouth to his ears, nearly decapitating him. The fourth was unrecognizable, his entire body a charred ruin. The fifth stared up, unseeing, in horror - a ragged slash across his neck, and a bloody pool where his left ear had been.

The sixth one, was something he had only read about in the papers. The man's face looked at peace - but down his torso were deep, horizontal cuts. His body had been drained of blood, but there was no blood to be found at the scene. This victim was not an echo of Will's past - it was an echo of the killer the press called Dracula.

It was impossible not to notice the similar appearance of these victims. Each of them had a similar build, similar height, had dark brown hair and a similar, tanned complexion. More strikingly, they each had the same eye color.

In photo after photo, Will Graham found his dead doppelgangers staring up at him.

It's him. There was no one else it could be.

He closed the folder, put it back on the desk.

"Where did these come from?" he asked simply.

"South America - all across the map. In order - Panama, Argentina, Chile, the last three in Brazil. No one made connections between these murders, each was handled by regional law enforcement - there was no discernible motive, and each method was completely different. At first glance, the victims' physical similarities are not that striking - many men fall within the same description. These cases only made their way to me after the sixth victim was found, because of the resemblance to the Dracula murders. It floated up to the FBI, but was quickly dismissed. Clearly the MO is not the same - Dracula's victims are all between the ages of sixteen and twenty five, are blonde, and have a distinctive look. And the timeline doesn't match up - there was no way Dracula could have been in Brazil. It was dismissed as - "

"A copycat," Will finished for her.

"Yes, a copycat. But something about it bothered me. Someone had put a lot of effort into copying Dracula. So I looked deeper. The victim was a convicted sex criminal, recently released after serving a ten year sentence. Turns out, five other convicted and suspected sex criminals had recently been murdered across South America - our boys here. I remembered your photograph from when the article was published - and I put together the pieces."

Will wove his fingers together, looked at Ardelia across the desk.

"You have good instincts, Agent Mapp. The FBI is lucky to have you - if only the reverse could be true. I know this is personal for you. It is for us as well."

Ardelia nodded, unsure if he would continue. Alana looked from the closed case file, then from Will to Ardelia.

"I'm impressed by what you've put together. But I don't know what more you can get from us, from Will. I don't think we can afford to become involved in your investigation. We've been through enough already."

Ardelia scooted to the edge of her chair, and looked into Alana's eyes.

"I agree. I'm not asking you to become involved. All I ask for is your cooperation - anything you think of, any information that comes your way, I want you to pass to me - not the FBI, directly to me. This is the strongest lead I've ever had on Lecter - it's practically gift wrapped. He seems intent on sending a message, and not just to anyone - to you. I just ask that when the message comes, you let me know. When I find Lecter, I know I'll find Clarice, too."

As she spoke, Will's eyes focused beyond Ardelia, on some unseen fragment of a thought. He rose from his chair, and paced to the window, blankly staring out of it. He was quiet for a long time.

When he spoke, he chose his words carefully.

"Agent Mapp, you have compiled some very compelling evidence. With more time, and some lucky breaks, I'm sure it would eventually lead you right to Lecter. Which is why you should stop looking. Forget all about Hannibal Lecter and Clarice Starling."

This was not what Ardelia had been expecting. She started to speak, but he continued, cutting her off.

"I know you've done your research, you've seen what he's done. But I have to emphasize - he's capable of things you can't even dream of, he can hurt you in ways that you couldn't invent in your worst nightmares. Your Starling is gone. Believe me, I understand the impulse - to follow him down the rabbit hole. I've seen inside his head, I went down the rabbit hole willingly, knowing what was waiting for me, and it still nearly destroyed me. I'm not talking about these scars, Agent Mapp. He can inflict wounds that no one will ever see, but they will cut you every day of your life. I don't want to be rude, but there is no chance for someone with no first hand experience, like yourself, to take down Hannibal Lecter."

"I'm sorry about Starling, I truly am. But she's dead, Ardelia. She's his puppet now, or she's in the ground. Either way, the Clarice you knew is gone. And when you find her, you'll regret the day you ever started looking."

Ardelia leapt to her feet, and slammed her hands on the desk in front of her. She was about to unleash a verbal tirade, but she held her tongue, instead glaring at the man across the room from her. He gazed back, eyes hollow. Alana still sat, her face set into a deep frown as she looked up at Will.

Ardelia took a deep breath. Will Graham was still her strongest link to Lecter, and thus, to Starling - she couldn't afford to alienate him so early on. She could continue to work on him - he still had decades worth of experience she might learn from, even if he wasn't willing to open up yet.

Ardelia recomposed herself.

"I understand. I know I'm asking a lot, I know you have a long history with Hannibal Lecter. But I won't give up on Clarice. I'll leave you this copy of the case file, and my card - please do not hesitate to call me if you change your mind."

Ardelia placed her card on the desk, exited the office, and was gone.

Will and Alana took a long walk around the grounds of their home, their dogs circling around them and occasionally bounding up ahead, playfully nipping at each other. They stopped on the edge of their pond, and Will skipped stones along the water's smooth surface. Alana scanned the ground, handing him round, flat rocks as she found them. One skip, two skip, three skip - plop.

"You did the right thing," Alana said, "Warning her. She can't pursue him alone." Will nodded.

"If Hannibal does still have Starling, he likes having her around. He'd destroy Mapp in the blink of an eye for trying to take his plaything away. If he doesn't have Starling, he'd destroy Mapp because he can. Because she got too close," he said, and skipped another stone.

"Unfortunately, I don't think the warning sank in. She's blinded by her need for justice."

"You think she'll follow her leads. That she'll actually go to South America and track him down. South America is a big place Will, she'll need more than what she has now to find him," Alana said, digging a skipping stone out of the dirt by her feet.

"You saw the victims, Alana. Charming way of sending a message, isn't it? Hannibal Lecter is not interested in repeating himself - making a copy of a copy no less - if he doesn't have something to say. It's clear that he's sending a message - Mapp had that right - but she missed that she already had part of the message right there in front of her."

He turned to her, and she recognized the look in his eye - he had seen the design in the chaos. She felt that heavy weight of gravity, tugging on her orbit.

"The sixth victim. He's done this before - dropped bodies to send me clues. He knows something about Dracula. And he wants to tell me, and only me, about it. That's his lure. Those murders weren't just a message - they were an invitation. To come and find him," he said, and turned to meet her eyes.

Alana clenched her jaw.

"Don't you dare, Will Graham. Don't you dare even think about it," she dropped the stone she had been holding to the ground. "You don't owe them anything."

"Alana," he said, stepping close to her, wrapping her arms in his hands. "When I knew that Hannibal had Abigail - I had to find her. If I hadn't - if I had just let him whisk her away, let him turn her into his perfect, blood-thirsty daughter - do you think I would have ever been able to look you in the eye again? Been able to look at my own damn reflection?"

"Will, this is different - "

"Is it? Because that's exactly how Ardelia Mapp feels. And I can't blame her."

Will's face swam before her, her vision blurred by anger. His eyes were fixed on her, the same large, piercing pools that had always reduced her down to her base elements. His skin could fold into wrinkles, his hair could grow gray and brittle, but his eyes would never change - just as his convictions never would.

She knew he had to go - he could not sit here while Hannibal had selected a new protégé, whisked her away to serve his purposes. All Alana could do now was to convince Will to return to her - to not be swallowed whole by his pursuit.

"He almost killed you. I can't - I won't lose you again."

Alana tugged on his collar, ran her hands up his neck and around his collarbone. He pressed his forehead against hers.

"Alana," he said. He stroked her cheek, brushed the hair from her face. He needed to communicate to her in touch, in looks - words were no longer adequate between them, blunt and imprecise tools. "You'll never lose me."

She looked at him for a long time.

"When are you leaving then?"

"In a few days. I need to see Abigail first," he said.

Alana drew him to her, pressed his body to hers. She breathed in the smell of his dusty jacket, his cheap aftershave, his fresh shampoo. She wanted to memorize every piece of Will Graham - she had so little time left.

"Will," she said, pulling away slightly. "There's another part to this. Something we've never really talked about." He gazed at her with wide, questioning eyes.

"I'll never know everything about what happened between you and Hannibal, in that cottage - and that's fine. I accepted that long ago. But I was there, Will. I was part of it - he wasn't above using me to get to you. What happened back then has never fully left you. I know that in a way... you fell in love with him. I think a part of you still loves him - what he was for you. The man beneath the monster."

Will's eyes dropped to the ground, then he brought them back up to Alana. He shook his head, but said nothing. She put her hands on either side of his face.

"I love you. I love you and I'm terrified that he will take you from me. All I want is for you to come back. In one piece."

She felt the tears, wet and hot, slide down her cheeks. Will reached up to wipe them away, and then he was pulling her back into his arms, his face buried into her hair.

"I'm going to come back, Alana. I promise. I will come back. I will."

He kissed the salty tears off her face. He kissed her all the way back to their front porch, all the way up the stairs to their bedroom. He kissed her neck and her ring finger, her left breast and her third rib. His lips trailed over her tailbone and the sole of her foot. His tongue tasted the pink flesh between her legs and the spot under the crook of her knee.

She, in return, traced her hands over every inch of his skin - from the scar on his left foot, the result of a boating accident as a boy, to the livid scar on his abdomen, to the gash on his left cheek. She found every tiny, inconsequential mole and mark in-between, and committed them to her memory.

Three days later she saw him off at the airport. Will kissed her, and walked off towards security, and then his terminal. This sight of him - of him leaving her, of his back as he disappeared into the distance - was not a memory she wanted to keep, she decided.

As Alana drove home, a thousand terrible scenarios played out in her mind, uninterrupted, uninvited, unstoppable.

She thought of Hannibal Lecter's understanding smile, his electric and masterful hands on her body. Ardelia Mapp's eyes, burning for revenge and justice. The photograph of Clarice Starling, smiling and full of promise on her graduation day. Abigail, on the steps of the courthouse, looking unnaturally adult in a skirt suit, face stern and hollow.

And Will, over and over again, turning and walking away, away, far away from her - a loop on endless repeat.

In the kitchen, Ardelia Mapp's business card burnt a hole on the table. Alana sat and looked at it, twisted it with her fingers, flipped it over and over, tapped it against the table's surface.

She knew Will would find Hannibal. Hannibal wanted to be found. To what ends, she could only guess.

When, and if, Hannibal Lecter sent Will back to her, she feared she would not have enough left to bury.

Alana placed Agent Mapp's business card on the table, took out her phone, and dialed the number.

Chapter End Notes

Next Chapter: Haunted by her conflicting feelings about Will Graham and Mischa Lecter, Abigail Hobbs launches her own investigation into Hannibal's past. Set post-trial, pre-Clarice.

Thank you guys for reading! If this fic is your jam, I have a huge favor to ask - I am desperately in need of a beta reader. If any of you, or anyone you know, would be willing to give me some input on the upcoming chapters, or if you wanna geek out with me over the upcoming second season, please hit me up! Find me at katieofthelake.tumblr.com

Lyrics by Neko Case, "Favorite"

Daddy, Daddy

Chapter Summary

Abigail searches Hannibal's past - and herself - for answers.

Chapter Notes

*I'm wrapped in the depths of these deeds that have made me
I can't bring a sound from my head though I try
I can't seem to find my way up from the basement
a demon holds my place on earth 'till I die*

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

October 15

Hannibal,

I am sick, sick, sick - twisted and strange, a confusing oddity and a disruptive force. Or so I hear. Yes, I was suspended once again. And once again, Robertus has grounded me, banishing me to my room.

I know you will scold me as well, but H, you would have done the same. The miserable boy would not stop chasing after Mary, pinching her and tugging at her pony tail, swiping his hand along her skirt when the teachers weren't looking. He deserved more than spit in his eye and a scratch on his face.

No good deed goes unpunished. Mary stared at me with the same disgust and confusion as the others. I did enjoy the sound of the boy whimpering, and the sight of his bleeding skin, before he turned and ran.

If Robert wants to lock me up like a criminal, fine. I have my books and my window. If I need fresh air, I can always make an escape across the rooftops.

Thank you for sending me the exhibit schedule for the spring. I'll try to stay on my best behavior, and then he will have no objections to me joining you for holiday. I can barely wait to escape his grasp - however briefly.

- Mischa

It was a beautiful house, Abigail decided as she chewed her sandwich, peering out the windshield. A stately brick townhouse with a neat, well-tended garden, pristine white trim around the windows, heavy curtains blocking all view of its interior. High class but not ostentatious - nothing particularly striking to draw the eye amongst its peers.

The neighborhood was similarly upscale and demure. Located near London's embassies and the homes of billionaires, this neighborhood was old and distinguished. Those who lived here were well off, if not as outlandishly rich as the adjacent residents.

For all its inconspicuous modest qualities, Abigail was positive the smooth exterior fronted an inherent corruption. A bandage over a long-festering wound.

It had taken her several months to identify this residency - six months after Abigail Hobbs had first arrived here, just after her her twenty-second birthday.

More accurately, it was not Abigail Hobbs who now sat in a silver Audi staking out a quiet London street, but a girl named Abigail Martin. Abigail Hobbs had remained stateside - immortalized in grainy tabloid photographs and newsreel footage of the Lecter trial.

Abigail Martin looked slightly different than the face of the girl connected to the grim story of manipulation, murder, and deception now familiar to every literate member of the public. Reconstructive surgery hid much of the scarring on her throat, and minor rhinoplasty just barely altered her profile. She had long lost the blonde hair with overgrown roots that she'd worn in court - it was an auburn color now, cut just below her shoulders.

A new name afforded her a thin veil of privacy. Abigail Martin was more likely to be mistaken for a look-alike than the real thing. This suited her just fine.

Abigail watched as the cleaning woman made her way down the street, pulling a cart of supplies behind her. She knew from her surveillance that the woman came once a week, and her visits were reliably timed and short. There couldn't be much cleaning to be done in a house that had no current occupants. Some dusting and vacuuming, general upkeep to make sure the house didn't fall into ruin. Appearances had to be kept, after all.

Finishing her sandwich, she tossed the wrapper onto the passenger seat, and took a swig of her now-watery diet soda. She snapped on her dark sunglasses and slid out of the car, walking briskly and with purpose down the street, away from the townhouse. She turned around the corner. Five more minutes and the cleaning service was due to be finished. Leaning against the brick wall of the nearest house, she took out her phone, pretending to text furiously into it.

With one minute left until the cleaning woman would be leaving, Abigail rounded the corner and walked slowly up the street, still pretending to be absorbed by her phone. Sure enough, the squat woman was exiting the house, supply cart in tow. Abigail knew exactly where she was, knew exactly how quickly she was moving - and she timed her pace so that she would meet the woman before she reached the white van she had arrived in.

When they collided it was natural - a last minute swerve by a preoccupied girl. Abigail knocked the woman well off her balance, and reached out to steady her, patting her on the shoulder.

“Oh, I am so sorry, are you alright?” she exclaimed in her best posh London accent. The woman nodded and mumbled a reassurance that she was fine. “I’m so clumsy, I really apologize.”

And just like that they were both off again, heading in different directions down the street. Abigail walked past the town house, and down the next two blocks, before doubling back once she knew the woman had driven away. Pressed into her palm was the smooth, heavy key that she had seen the cleaning woman use to open the door, then drop into her apron pocket every time she went to the house.

She had already chosen a locksmith - Abigail promptly made a copy of the key and returned to the house within the hour, dropping the original on the landing of the house. When the cleaning woman noticed the key was missing, she would return to search for it and find that sure enough, she had dropped it right outside the door. No need to panic, no need to change the lock.

Abigail pressed the key against her palm, fiddling with it in her pocket as she walked up to her own flat. To be on the safe side, she’d wait until morning to venture in. It was a blistering wait. Even lying in bed, she felt the cold metal cutting into the skin of her palm, begging to twist open the lock to that shuttered townhouse. She needed to know if what she sought was contained behind its solid brick walls, or if what she chased after had been destroyed long ago - if it had ever existed at all.

She had made it this far - she could wait one more night to find out.

Nightmares tickled at the edges of Abigail’s mind as she attempted to slip into sleep.

A flushed body beside hers, slick with perspiration. No, not sweat - the the moisture on her skin had a muddy, metallic odor. The body beside her writhed, a voice moaned - in fear or ecstasy, hers or her victim’s, she could not tell. Hands on her throat, and she couldn’t breathe - but it felt so good, so painfully good that her body vibrated in pleasure.

She wanted to scream but couldn't, the grip tightened around her windpipe and she was coming apart, pieces of her rattling loose from her bones, her skin peeling like burning tinder, emptiness rushing in to fill the gaps between her muscles and veins -

Her whole body clenched and unclenched, and the force of her climax shook her awake. Nauseous but tingling, she stared at the ceiling as she caught her breath. She should be used to this jarring juxtaposition by now, she thought - yet the sticky feeling of blood on her skin, though imaginary, always proved difficult to wash off.

Before the sun broke the horizon, before even the morning papers had been delivered, Abigail found herself back on the upscale street, slipping past the darkened windows. When she reached her destination, she did not pause to make a grand entrance, or to steel herself in anticipation. She simply unlocked the door and slid inside, as though she had always belonged on this foyer.

Abigail stood in the entryway of Mischa and Hannibal Lecter's childhood home, and blinked into the darkness.

Abigail had done her research. This had been the primary residence of Hannibal Lecter's only living relative, Robertus Lecter, for nearly four decades, up until six years ago when he had sold the property to a man named David Burns.

It had taken Abigail quite a bit of digging to find that this David Burns did not exist.

No David Burns had ever moved in. This house had never taken another occupant. It was clear that none of its original furnishings had been disturbed. It was evacuated, but not abandoned - the contents were too valuable to be surrendered to strangers, their memories too painful to sort through. So the house had been set aside and forgotten, left to fend for itself.

Perhaps he had sold the house to protect it. The press had never found this place - they were too preoccupied with where Robertus Lecter had been living during Hannibal's arrest. (Abigail remembered the pictures of the lush estate, considerably more extravagant than this one.)

Well, she supposed one person besides her had not forgotten it - he was most definitely the puppeteer behind the fake David Burns, although she couldn't prove it. She knew from first hand experience the lengths to which he could engineer a hideaway. He had foreseen a time he might need to travel undercover, undetected - a man who lived like he did, as intelligent as he was, was sure to have a backup plan. Or several. Hiding this house was surely one of many.

Being locked away in prison had probably not been high on his list.

Abigail strained her eyes into the pitch black interior, no light penetrating the thick curtains on the windows. She considered using the flashlight she had brought, but then decided to use the lights in the house. She wanted to see what it really looked like - what it had looked like with someone living there.

Groping the nearest wall, she found the closest light switch and flicked it on. A soft yellow light filled the room, emitted by two standing lamps.

If she had not been watching the house for weeks, had not known for a fact that no one lived here any longer, she would be fooled into thinking its occupants had just left. The interior was lushly furnished, deep burgundy carpets with mahogany furniture, plush upholstery, framed paintings on the wall. It was an immaculate time capsule - sealed and preserved.

She stepped into the den, observing the heavy masculine furnishings, severe with an Eastern European air. A standup piano stood against one wall, a stone fireplace flanked with solid armchairs was against another. Built in bookcases brimming with thick tomes covered two walls. This had clearly been a man's home, and he had made no comfort concessions when his young orphaned niece and nephew had been thrust upon him. Hannibal had been ten, Mischa eight. The house gave no clues that children had ever lived there.

The lower level consisted of the den, a sitting room, a dining room, a powder room, and a kitchen, all furnished in the same unforgiving masculine manner. Abigail could see how this house was a prototype for his Baltimore home - imposing, structured - but admittedly, Hannibal had quite a bit more style.

Abigail wandered through the den and dining room, down the panelled hallways and past the cramped powder room.

She found herself lingering in the doorway before entering the kitchen. It was different than his Baltimore kitchen - smaller and with outdated appliances - but here she felt his presence. She knew he was not there. He was nearly four thousand miles away, across an ocean, locked away in the basement of the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane - but still, in this kitchen, she felt that she would look over her shoulder and find him behind her, offering her a drink.

She was not the same girl who had helped herself to jam and pomegranates in his kitchen, nearly four years ago. He had dragged her to his underworld - beautiful and glittering - but she had clawed her way back up to the dull and gruesome surface.

Abigail surveyed the kitchen from the doorway. She still did not know if she had made the right choice. She turned from the room and went back down the hallway, and up the staircase that led to the second and third floors.

The second floor was dedicated entirely to a sprawling and decadent master suite. Adjoined to the bedroom was a spacious study, a closet that had clearly been a smaller bedroom at one point, and an enormous bathroom with a separate shower and jacuzzi tub. The study looked down onto the picturesque street, while the bedroom had a view over the small but tidy backyard. Robert Lecter had carefully designed this sanctuary as a retreat for himself, luxurious in every detail. Hannibal had learned from the master. Abigail did not linger here, what she sought would not be hidden in this quarantined sanctuary.

Up the stairs she went again, to the third floor.

As soon as she stepped onto the landing, she felt the promise this floor held for her. Immediately she saw the heavy layer of dust on every surface - the floors, the moulding, the doorframes, the wall sconces. Clearly the hired help had been instructed to not disturb this level. Three closed doors lined the hallway.

Not worried about leaving behind evidence, Abigail crossed the hallway to the first door, disturbing the dust on the floorboards. She'd obscure her tracks later.

She found the first door unlocked, and pushed it open to find a small bathroom, smelling faintly of rust and mildew. The contrast with the oasis of Robert's chambers was striking. While the second floor had been immaculate, recently renovated and modern, this bathroom was frozen in the seventies, complete with matching avocado green sink, toilet and tub. The walls and tile were a dusty rose color.

Abigail spotted the medicine cabinet above the sink, and stepped inside the bathroom. She peered into the clouded mirror, slightly rusted at the edges, examining herself - half expecting the blonde-haired Mischa to look back out at her - but only her usual face with auburn locks greeted her. She tucked an errant strand of hair back into place.

Cracking open the mirror, she studied the interior of the cabinet. Remarkably its contents were as untouched and ancient as the decor - several tubes of old lipstick, a compact of dry and cracked eyeshadow, crusty makeup brushes, a perfume bottle whose contents had evaporated, several empty pill bottles.

Abigail began to reach for one of the tubes of lipstick - but when her hand reached eye level, she realized it was trembling. As she looked at it, the trembling traveled from her hand down her arm to her chest, from her chest down to her stomach then to her legs. She gripped the edge of the sink as she shook, unable to rip her eyes away from those pathetic mundane artifacts that had been sealed away in this medicine cabinet for decades.

That lipstick had been worn by another girl, in another era, another lifetime - she had used her fingers to smear that eyeshadow, she had spritzed herself with that perfume in this very room, she had medicated herself with the contents of those pill bottles. That girl had actually existed in the physical world, had been a full human being, had moved and walked and ate and talked. She had once been her own person, and not only lived in Hannibal's heart and Abigail's body and mind.

Regaining control of her limbs, Abigail took a deep breath and steadied herself. She closed the cabinet and looked in the mirror once again before exiting the bathroom.

Her heart beat with erratic rhythm as she made her way down to the second door. She really should have learned her lesson about sneaking around the residences of Hannibal Lecter by now - she was rarely prepared for what she would witness. Abigail contemplated turning back now - yet it seemed like the short trip from the front door and up two flights of stairs had actually been a climb up a steep, treacherous slope. She would soldier on.

Her hands gripped the doorknob to the second door - sure enough, it was locked. Not a problem. Amongst practicing foreign accents, investigating public records, and taekwondo, lockpicking was one of Abigail's new hobbies. Not very proficient yet, she had not wanted to

attempt it on the open street - but here in the confines of the house, she could take her time. She extracted her pick from her bag, and with careful diligence and a few swears, the door clicked open.

Hannibal's bedroom was a decent size, although the sprawling excess of the master suite dwarfed its dimensions. Like the hallway, a layer of dust covered every surface, and Abigail circled the room, inspecting each piece of furniture. Like the lower level, the furnishings were all of high quality, built to last - a heavy wooden desk was pushed against the only window in the room, and Abigail clicked on the desk lamp that sat upon it, still plugged in. The dim light illuminated the rest of the room, allowing her to better inspect its contents.

Young Hannibal Lecter was just as organized and meticulous as the older version, and shared the various interests and hobbies of his future self. On the walls were various drawings and paintings - delicate etchings of songbirds, vibrant oil landscapes, ethereal watercolor lilies. All appeared to be originals - she could see the indentations on the paper, the texture of the paint. In the corner, each was signed with an elegant *ML*.

Next to the twin bed covered in a dusty, sun-stained quilt, was a record player. Nearby was a large wooden trunk, stuffed edge to edge with records - everything from Miles Davis to Tchaikovsky. Abigail ran her fingers over the still pristine album covers, pausing almost instinctively over a particular record - she pulled up a copy of Chopin recordings. She dropped it back into the box, as though burned.

The bookshelves were packed with a variety of volumes, organized with meticulous zeal. One shelf was dedicated entirely to science texts, the next to psychology, the next to history, all arranged alphabetically by author name. The second bookcase was dedicated entirely to art and literature, with a shelf each to art history, poetry, classic novels, and plays. Everything the budding intellect needed to feast on.

She carefully went over the contents of the bookshelves, searching for something concealed, something she may have missed. Nothing jumped out at her. Abigail turned to the desk, opening its drawers, carefully making sure she did not overlook any secret compartment or false bottom. No space was found unaccounted for. The drawers were strangely empty, containing only pens and blank note pads.

Frustrated, Abigail sat in the desk chair, and observed the room. It had to be here. Hannibal was, amongst other things, a man of practiced habit. He had to have kept one - all signs pointed to its existence. She hadn't found it anywhere else, so it must be here, in this locked and forgotten tower.

She did not have Will's gift of empathy - and from what she knew of his mind, she had never wished to share that ability. Will had told her it was not like people portrayed it to be - as though he were a mutant with super powered empathy. What he did was make connections and associations faster and with greater gaps in information than others could. This was how he could step into a killer's mind - he took situational clues to their farthest conclusion. Abigail tried to recreate Will's ability to make connections now, envisioning a young Hannibal in her place.

He would not have wanted her to find it while he was home. Robert did not often disturb the contents of this upper floor, but Mischa treated his space like her own, and felt free to use his belongings like hers. He was glad to share with her, but she had found it before and seen something she was not meant to. Best to put it somewhere she would not stumble upon it. It was where he always put it, a spot hidden from sight but easily accessible.

Where would a teenager, with only this tiny sanctuary of space within a house that was barely a home, hide his most private possessions?

Abigail dropped to the floor, inspecting the floorboards, knocking and rattling them. Sure enough, under the bed - her knuckles were met with an empty echo. She pried up the loose floorboard, reaching around inside the hollow hiding place. The tips of her fingers connected with something solid, and she wrapped her hand around it, pulling it from its long term concealment.

The leather satchel was heavy, weighed down by its contents. Abigail ran her hands over its still-smooth surface, appreciating the fine texture and hand stitching. A schoolboy's bookbag. In the corner of the top flap, an embossed *HL* broke the smooth texture.

Her prize lay inside. The two thick, leather bound journals lay nestled together, cushioned by a packet of letters tied together with string.

After Abigail had awoken in that sun drenched garden, after she had killed Mischa and became herself again - she had attempted to put herself back together. Had she liked painting before or after Mischa? Had she found violence both arousing and repulsive before or after? Had she always been so callous and un pitying towards the plights of others - or was that Mischa?

She felt she was Frankenstein's monster, cobbled together by the mad ambition of men, unable to tell if she had ever been inherently good - or if she had been rotten from the beginning.

There were no answers. Will had suggested a therapist - she refused to see one unless he did as well. So neither of them went.

Instead, when she could not learn about herself, she decided to learn about the monster who had tried to remake her. Before they could be confiscated by the police, Abigail had broken into Hannibal's home office and taken all of his journals. Their scope and detail was impressive, but they had only started during his tenure in medical school. They rarely discussed his childhood either, as though he had sprung from the earth a young man. She wanted to go back further. She wanted to know how the monster himself had been made.

Instead of therapy, she occupied herself by investigating Hannibal Lecter's past. She knew she would never fully come to an understanding this way - of herself or of him - but it was enough. Before she had come to London, she had not even been sure if Mischa had ever been real, or just a creation of his imagination.

Abigail had dedicated herself to this investigation. A copy of Mischa Lecter's death certificate lay in a folder in her apartment, together with an article about the circumstances

surrounding her demise. Abigail had briefly glanced over each artifact, only to confirm their contents before setting them aside for further perusal. Before she learned about Mischa's death, she wanted to know how she had lived.

The heavy journals rested in her hands, and she contemplated reading them all right here. She had not expected to find letters - she had never found any letters set aside before. Their envelopes were still crisp, not yellowed by the sun yet, having been stored in their dark, cool refuge.

Abigail did not have to look at the finely etched return address to see who had sent them. There was a reason she had not found any in his Baltimore residence. The sole being whose letters he had valued enough to keep had died before her sixteenth birthday.

She put them back in the bag, deciding to read them later. She still had one more room to explore.

Leaving behind the organized logic of Hannibal's room, Abigail approached the last door in the hallway.

Once again, it was locked - Abigail's hands were steady as she manipulated the lockpick. Finally, the tumblers clicked open, and she pushed open the door.

If not for the thin layer of dust covering everything, it looked as though Mischa had just left. Piles of books covered the floor, interspersed with tubes of paint, rolls of canvas, and tins bursting with paintbrushes. The walls were plastered with all variety of drawings and magazine clippings, art posters and original paintings, each one overlapping the next, as though she had just pinned them up as they were acquired. At least three easels cluttered the space, each with the beginnings of a work in progress.

Abigail hovered in the doorway. Her heart fluttered in her throat. She was torn - that familiar voice called to her, pulled on her chest, whispering herself back into being. Bracing herself, she entrenched into her own mind. Mischa would not take over again. Abigail would enter this room, and Abigail alone would leave it.

She stepped through the door.

Her nose was instantly filled with the mingling odors of dried paint and molding wood. This was the only place in the house that had a distinct smell, the air of decay clinging to this corner alone.

Mischa's bed was crowded into the corner, an afterthought in this space dedicated to art and expression. Across the room, half of a wall was taken up by a sprawling desk splattered with paint, and piled high with sketchbooks and journals. Next to the desk was a bookcase, organized in no particular fashion - poetry mixed with art history, the monotony of aligned spines broken by a variety of figurines and collectibles.

Abigail delicately toed around the scattered drawings and open books on the ground, moving to inspect the collage of artifacts arranged on the wall. Around the desk were several large architectural sketches, finely detailed and rendered cityscapes and exteriors. These she

seemed to have prized - each one was awarded its own place on the wall, not overlapping any other sketch. Their ordered elegance provided a stark contrast to the chaotic but vibrant sketches around them. Abigail leaned in to look at the signature - sure enough, these were signed with an *HL* in the corner.

Where Hannibal's drawings were elegant and refined, Mischa's spilled off the page with life and energy. The feathers of a songbird sketched in black ink were ruffled by the wind, as if it were ready fly off the page. A watercolor river rippled in the sunlight. The pencilled knitting needles of an old woman in a rocking chair were poised to make the next stitch. They both had skill - but Mischa breathed art, she lived in the strokes of her brush, the colors on the canvas. It was easy to see how someone would covet her talent, and want to nurture and feed its growth.

Several notebooks lay strewn open on the desk, waiting for an author that would never return.

Abigail chose one on top, flipping through the pages. These drawings were nothing like the ones on the walls - dark ink and charcoal covered each page, and plumes of smeared smoke and fire licked at the bindings. Buildings lay in ruins, landscapes became dark and looming. These were not the dainty and charming life drawings displayed to show off her skill. These came straight from the blackest corner of her mind.

Interspersed with the drawings were quotes - Abigail recognized Melville, Anne Sexton, Allen Ginsberg, Sylvia Plath. There were also poems in other languages - French, Italian, German - and some that she did not recognize.

This notebook was full of sketches of a recurring figure - a ghostly woman cloaked in flowing robes, feet and hands dark with soot. Her face was always obscured, her long pale hair sometimes hanging limp, matted and tangled - other times it seemed alive, twisting in the air like snakes.

The last pages were dedicated to lush and horrifying illustrations of Sylvia Plath's Lady Lazarus. Abigail's fingers trembled as she read the lines of the poem, carefully copied in Mischa's slanted handwriting.

Dying

Is an art, like everything else.

I do it exceptionally well.

I do it so it feels like hell.

I do it so it feels real.

I guess you could say I've a call.

Across the pages, the woman was dragged from life to death back to life again. She began whole and clean, then was thrust into a grave where Mischa drew her rotting, eaten by worms.

So, so, Herr Doktor.

So, Herr Enemy.

I am your opus,

I am your valuable,

The pure gold baby

That melts to a shriek.

I turn and burn.

The ghost woman, whole again, gleaming and well dressed, sat with two long, pale hands resting on her shoulders. The owner of the hands was hidden by a shadow engulfing the entire page.

The rest of the poem blurred before Abigail's eyes as she felt herself sucked into the dark spiral of Mischa's illustrations. She turned the final page and her heart shuddered in her chest.

Gazing up from the paper with pitiless black eyes, the ghost woman's face filled the page. Her mouth hung open, but not in a scream - her teeth were bared, ready to devour her observer. Abigail could hear her rasping breath, could feel the unrelenting gaze ripping into her soul, could see her red hair spilling off of the page and onto the desk, singeing the paper in its wake.

The ghost had completed her transformation. No longer a wandering phantasm, she was vengeance in the flesh, a vortex poised to consume and destroy.

Abigail slammed the book shut, the empty pits of the woman's eyes burned into her memory.

Groping blindly, Abigail collected as many journals from the desk as she could, stashing them into her bag. Soon it was bulging with their weight, stuffed to capacity. Abigail glanced around the room. She wanted to take everything with her, every drawing and notebook and figurine - she wanted to empty this sealed shrine to a dead girl. She wouldn't be able to carry it all in one trip. But she had time - she would return.

There was one more thing she wanted to make sure she had. If Hannibal had collected and preserved Mischa's letters, surely he had sent replies. And if Abigail was lucky, the receiver had likewise treasured the correspondence.

She fluttered about the room, opening drawers and searching compartments. Finally, in the drawer of the bedside table, she found the letters haphazardly stowed. Carefully, Abigail collected them, placing them in Hannibal's bag alongside the others.

The sun would be rising soon. Abigail wanted to leave before the neighbors would be pulled from the comforts of sleep, and be able to see her sneak from the building. She had found what she came for and more - now it was time to depart the ghosts of young Hannibal Lecter and his sister.

Exiting Mischa's room, Abigail purposefully stirred up all of the dust on the floor of the upstairs hallway to hide her footprints. Down the first flight, then the second, and she was passing the den on the way to the front door when something caught her eye.

Above the mantle were two identical picture frames. She had seen them when she first came in, but had barely given them a second glance. Now, they stuck out to her - although the frames were identical, the pictures inside were not - both were prints, but one was a photograph of London's skyline, and the second was a drawing of a rose. The mismatch of the images now seemed bizarre to Abigail - wrong but purposeful.

Pulled towards the pictures, she found herself crossing the den and reaching up to remove the frames from the wall. They were deceptively heavy. Carefully laying them on the coffee table, she first flipped over the picture of the London skyline, and began to remove the backing.

Sure enough, behind the cheap print, was a canvas painting. Abigail spotted Mischa's signature on the back, and she knew what she would find on the front. Freeing the canvas from the frame, she turned it over.

The visage of a teenaged Hannibal Lecter smiled up at her.

He was unmistakable - the razor-sharp cheekbones, the perfect downturned mouth, all highlighted in the face of the youthful Adonis. But it was the eyes that struck Abigail. These were not the eyes of the man she knew - closed, concealing, calculating. Mischa had painted his eyes with humor and warmth - although his mouth was just barely turned upwards in a smile, his eyes revealed mirth and joy. They lit up the entire portrait, his inner luminescence unable to be contained within the two small spheres.

Abigail knew who she would find looking up at her in the second frame. A still calm came over her as she once again removed the backing (she found Hannibal's signature on this one), and freed the canvas.

Mischa Lecter looked up at her, face solemn and intense. Gleaming waves of blonde hair fell around her oval face, her plush pink lips set in a neutral position, neither unhappy nor joyful. Her chin was tilted slightly upward, giving the impression that she was looking down to inspect you, assess your worthiness. Again, Abigail was caught in the eyes. Mischa's eyes were a roiling storm, deep and volatile. Her gaze was inquisitive, probing, devouring - giving the portrait a compelling yet terrifying air. This Mischa was someone she would desperately want to know, but be too intimidated by to approach.

Side by side, the Lecter siblings were a haunting pair. Both portraits had been created with nothing but love and admiration for their subjects. Yet she could see why they had been covered up - it was too painful to look at them. Both souls were irretrievably lost - the boy with the smiling eyes had died the day they put his sister in the ground.

Abigail hesitated in indecision, fingers grasping the edges of Mischa's portrait. Then, she carefully stacked the portraits together and rolled them up. Re-assembling the frames, she hung the cheap prints back in their original positions. With the canvas roll tucked beneath her arm, she exited the Lecter house, and locked the front door behind her.

Weighed down by the words and thoughts of Mischa and Hannibal, and carrying their likenesses against her chest, Abigail blindly walked down the rapidly brightening London streets. She went several blocks to where she had parked her car, and then kept walking. When she came to the third tube entrance on her journey, she finally ducked underground, and boarded a train heading towards her flat.

She felt hollow, emptied out from the sole of her feet to the roots of her hair.

Despite having just been immersed in the world of the Lecter siblings, having her mind once again invaded by their presence, her thoughts did not linger in the cramped attic sanctuary.

Instead, she imagined a scene four thousand miles away, on a breezy dock in Sugarloaf Key, Florida.

She saw him now as she had during their time together in the Key - relaxed, fishing reel in the water, eyes on the horizon. Abigail smiled at the image. For the thousandth time since she had left Florida, she wondered how Will Graham was doing in his (their) tiny house on the water, so far away from the bustle and congestion of mainland living.

From his emails she knew the dogs were doing well - he sent her pictures of her favorites, tousling together in the sand. Recently he had been dating a woman he had met at the repair shop, Molly - he mentioned her occasionally. Abigail had met her once, briefly, before she left. Molly seemed nice, normal, balanced - everything Will deserved.

Abigail stayed on the train three stops past her station, and had to get off the car and double back.

She wanted to call Will, tell him what she had found. She wanted to hear his voice, wanted to be held and coddled like a child. She wanted to spill her secrets to him, to be indulged and spoiled. But Abigail wouldn't call him. Someone like her didn't deserve to encroach onto Will Graham's new, peaceful life.

After Hannibal's arrest, the story of Will and Abigail's ordeal had exploded into the news. Will Graham, framed for murder by a serial killer masquerading as his therapist. Hannibal Lecter, committing unspeakable atrocities right under the FBI's nose. Abigail Hobbs, cannibal's daughter presumed dead - kidnapped and brainwashed into becoming a killer. Media outlets could not have come up with a more sensational story - thousands of words were spilled describing the horrors of Lecter's crimes, almost none of them true.

Abigail could care less what the blogs and tabloids said about her. But she was a young, beautiful, damaged girl - the press was relentless in pursuing her. When they ran out of facts to repeat, they made them up - creating stories further and further from reality. They never could make up their minds - half called her the Daughter of the Devil, half hailed her as a vigilante hero.

They moved to Florida shortly after the trial. During which, Will was still recuperating from his massive injuries, and was in and out of the hospital. Abigail insisted on staying by his side through the recovery - so he had rented a row house in Baltimore for them to share. (Will never returned to the farmhouse in Wolf Trap, not even to collect his belongings.) After he was released from the hospital, and after the sentencing, they found themselves free to go where they wished.

And they wished to go far, far away from Quantico and Baltimore - where around every corner was another photographer, a reporter, a pair of prying eyes.

After being at the mercy of Hannibal Lecter, Abigail did not fear being at the mercy of others' opinions - but Will had hated the attention, the scrutiny that she was put under. Every photographer in the bushes, every journalist asking for an interview was a reminder of the life she would never have, the innocence that had been taken from her. He cared little about what was printed about himself. So she did what she could to protect herself - to protect him.

Abigail knew who she was. The words of strangers and a little surgery wouldn't change that.

At last, Abigail found herself at the door to her flat. With difficulty, she extracted her now-buried keys, and thrust herself across the landing.

Her flat was small, but high end and comfortable. The generic furniture distributed throughout the rooms had come with the place, the only personal touches added by Abigail were souvenirs bought in London. A few books, some posters from museums. Months ago, she had arrived in London with everything she owned on this earth - the contents of a small suitcase.

In her room, Abigail gently placed Hannibal's satchel on her desk, followed by Mischa's sketchbooks, and the portraits. After a night of little rest, exhaustion tugged at her limbs, pulling her towards the ground. But she didn't want to sleep. She knew what she would see when she closed her eyes, and did not look forward to whatever variation her subconscious decided to torture her with that night.

She collapsed onto her bed, fully clothed, gazing at the blank walls surrounding her. The sight of Mischa's cluttered room and Hannibal's own collection drifted into her mind, mocking her. Her eyes flicked to the portraits rolled up on her desk, and she imagined hanging them up on her wall. A hollow laugh died in her throat. *How pathetic Abigail, to surround yourself with nothing but emptiness. Don't you love anything? Even he has decorated his prison cell.*

"Stop it," she told herself out loud, feeling crazy as she did so.

She had tried to forget that horrible visit to Hannibal's cell, but the memory threatened the edges of her sleep-starved consciousness. Every time she closed her eyes, the shadow-obscured face of her tormentor leered at her from the darkness.

Desperately, she tried to erase the image. Sunsets over the bay, mosquitoes biting her ankles. Sun burning her arms, boat rocking gently beneath her. The silence of the night only disturbed by the sound of water crashing against the shore, the dock creaking against its force.

"I do have things I love. I do. I do love."

Outside of Abigail's window, the sun finished its ascent into the sky. She did not see it behind her closed eyelids. Inside her mind, the sun disappeared below the horizon. The buzzing of the mosquitoes fell silent. The water receded from the shore, leaving only dry sand and darkness.

A hand on her arm, and she turned to find Will beside her. They were back outside the cottage where Hannibal had kept them, his perfect twisted family. She felt dirt under her knees, smelled the sticky sweetness of her rose garden. Will smiled beside her, taking both of her hands in his and pressing something smooth and heavy into her palm.

She looked down at the knife in her hand, rolling the handle in her palm to test its weight. Will leaned in towards her, placing both hands on the side of her head, fingers tangling in her hair. His face was barely an inch away from hers.

"It's alright, Abigail. I want to feel it."

Then he was dragging her towards him, backwards and down, her bare skin brushing against the rough fabric of his clothing as he pulled her on top of him. She was naked, her pale thighs framing his ribs as she sat on his lap. On the ground, Will caressed her hips, pressing his head into the ground, dirt matting into his hair. He guided her free hand to his fully clothed chest, urging her to unbutton his shirt. She complied, and soon she was caressing his skin, feeling the sinewy muscles that laid beneath it, the jut of his bones beneath them.

There, above his pelvic bone, was the mottled scar Hannibal had given him that night. She trailed her fingers around it - below her, Will gasped in pleasure, arched up into her touch. His arousal pressed through his pants, and she ground herself against it. Again, she ghosted her fingertips across the scar - Will practically growled. His hands flew up - with one he grabbed Abigail's buttocks, the other, the wrist of the hand still holding the knife. Her breath hitched with pleasure from the pressure of his grip.

"*More,*" he groaned. "*I need it.*"

She released him from his pants, sitting further back on his legs, and stroked his hardness. He bucked beneath her. The grip around her wrist tightened - he pressed the flat metal of the knife against his ribs and she knew what he wanted. Yes - she wanted it too.

Propping herself above him, she readied the knife. He released her wrist, now using both hands to guide her hips. She hovered the point of the knife just above the scar tissue. In

perfect synchrony, she lowered herself onto his cock - and the blade sliced open the old wound, sinking into his flesh.

Pleasure shot like a bullet through her body, passing through her groin and to her belly. It hit her twofold - she felt the knife like an appendage, and while Will pressed into her, she pressed back into him. He moaned and quivered beneath her, each of them making desperate gasps for air.

Abigail marveled at the velvet texture of the wound she had reopened at the base of his ribs. Sticky red blood gushed forth, spilling down his stomach onto the dirt. She thrust the knife upwards, creating a longer gash on his skin, the blade deep into his gut. One hand still gripping the handle, she caressed the edges of his wound with the other. Mewling, he thrust up into her with a desperate violence.

“Deeper,” he pleaded, voice rattling in pleasure. *“I want to feel it deep inside.”*

Saliva pooled in her mouth as she gazed down at him. He looked back, eyes two black pools of lust and need, his hungry pink tongue poking between flushed lips, entire body twitching with sensation. She stroked the gash, felt the slick slosh of fluid against muscle and tissue, and coated her fingers with his blood. The scent was overwhelming - peppery and sharp - and she wanted more more *more*.

Abigail sucked his blood from her fingers, tongue lapping between every crease, her eyes never leaving Will's.

He writhed beneath her - then she was pushing the knife deeper into him, and he thrust up into her, painfully hard, and the hilt of the knife was under his skin and her fist had sunk into the cavity of his abdomen. She felt the silken flesh of his gut, the gurgle of his fluids escaping, the unceasing *thump thump thump* of his heart vibrating up her arm and through her chest --

Cold, dry hands reached through emptiness to wrap around her shoulders. Abigail snapped her head up - around her the rose garden had morphed into a thorny forest of antlers. The earthy smell of Will's blood was replaced by the stench of rot - thick and choking. A cold breeze passed by her ear.

“Very good, Abigail. This is what you were taught to do. You do not know how to be gentle, how to be loving. But this - this is exquisite.”

Below her, the warmth radiating from Will had vanished. All sound had disappeared into a void. Panic surged through her body. Abigail looked down and found nothing but the glassy eyes of death staring back at her.

No. No, no, no no no -

Air rushed into her lungs with a painful force as sunlight flooded her vision, erasing the pall of sleep.

Her entire body shook - she sucked in shallow breaths, blinking to adjust her vision, only to find herself overcome with nausea. Abigail barely made it to the bathroom before the bile came bubbling up her throat. She let the nausea wash over her, emptying her stomach of what little contents it had, and let the cool tile of the bathroom floor ground her back into reality.

Perhaps it would be easier to forget Hannibal Lecter's cruel words if she did not, in part, believe them herself.

It had been several months since she had dwelled on their meeting in the Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. He had taunted Jack into summoning her before him - playing one of his trump cards. Hannibal would reveal where the rest of Miriam Lass was - but only to Abigail, in person.

Abigail had already known she had to leave Will. She was going to move out, but had not decided where. Dreams about him had plagued her for months - different variations, different scenarios, but always the same pieces.

Sex. Violence. Death. It was no way for a girl to think about her father-figure companion.

So, despite Will's protests, she had made her way down that frigid corridor, past the muttering and chattering of its inhabitants, to Hannibal's cell.

He had not called her there to talk about Miriam Lass.

"Abigail. You are more stunning than ever. But you must be more careful under the brutal Florida sun - it will ruin your skin."

She stiffened at the mention of her residential state - he couldn't have known, no one who knew would have released that information to him. A guess. Her body language had now given away that he was spot on.

"And how is your new father, Abigail? Can you see the weight of guilt and responsibility in his eyes when he looks at you? Yes, I am sure he adores and dotes upon his damaged little daughter. But I know you, Abigail. You will never be able to trust his kind words, his assurances. You will resent him for them. They are needles under your skin, prodding wounds he will never see."

She refused to break in front of him. Abigail demanded he tell her about Miriam Lass. He continued as though she had not spoken, his red eyes gleaming in the dark.

"Resentment and dependence are constants in your heart now - they wage a daily battle. Abigail, you must let them go. It will be difficult - you do not know how to love and be loved in return. It's not your fault. You were never taught how - all you were taught was how to bond with your captor. You are captive to no one but yourself now, Abigail.

"Tell me, have you been dreaming of your new father? Fantasies of such vivid detail that they begin to cloud your waking thoughts? Do you dream of him fucking you - does he writhe beneath you, moaning your name? Listen to me, Abigail. What you feel for Will is not love. You do not know how to love. What you know how to do is manipulate and deceive - and he

is the perfect subject, isn't he? You are fixated on him - you have seen him at his most vulnerable, his most enraptured. You are projecting your most destructive sexual desires upon the person it would most hurt you to disappoint."

Abigail shook, no longer able to keep the tears from silently rolling down her cheeks. She did not trust herself to speak. He had read her, inside and out, without her needing to utter a single word.

"It torments you, the fantasies you have. You want to be a proper daughter. You think that you cannot escape the traps of your own mind - but you can. Create an escape within yourself - create distance between who you are and who you want to be. Distance yourself from the source of your confusion - from Will. Use your natural talents Abigail, and deceive *yourself*. *Become someone else*. I once built a refuge for you, free of pain, but you rejected her - so now you must construct your own."

The cell blurred before her, disappearing as tears filled her eyes. She blinked them away, finding herself back in her London bedroom, staring down at the pile of notebooks, journals and letters she had stacked on her desk.

Hannibal's words continued to mock her - *What you feel for Will is not love. You do not know how to love.*

Rage bubbled up inside of her, momentarily overriding her self pity with the white-hot need for vengeance.

I am what you made me to be. How dare you judge me- how dare you pity me.

With one violent sweep of her arms, all of the materials she had collected went flying through the air, flapping onto the ground. Abigail slammed her fists onto the empty desk. She screamed through clenched teeth. She sunk to the ground and clenched her hair, snot and tears dripping down her face, her forehead pressed against the floorboards.

Her hatred ate away at her, made her feel sick and weak - and then repulsed by her own frailty. How dare Hannibal Lecter offer her reassurances and deadly barbs twisted together, in one breath - one word comforting, the next condemning.

She hated him for spreading his obsession with Will to her like a disease. She hated her father for teaching her that to love was to consume, to destroy.

Abigail hated herself for allowing them to sculpt her mind like clay, after their own designs.

Steadying her breath, Abigail raised herself off the floor and onto her knees. Self-hatred would not heal her. Even if she was a monster, even if she believed she was unworthy of his kindness - Will Graham believed in her. That had to count for something. He was the only person in the world that she trusted.

Calmly, she began to collect Mischa and Hannibal's journals from the floor. Luckily, none of them had been severely damaged by the fall. A spray of letters covered the area, and she crawled around to collect them, meticulously sorting them into two piles, according to sender.

Abigail retrieved a clump of letters that had fallen on top of a journal, and stopped in her tracks. It had fallen open, and Abigail found herself transfixed by the image on the pages.

Once again, the lines of a poem were etched into the paper in Mischa's slanted handwriting, the words engulfed on the page by the illustration.

So daddy, I'm finally through.

The black telephone's off at the root,

The voices just can't worm through.

If I've killed one man, I've killed two-- -

A barefooted girl stood above the written lines, inky blotches staining her sundress. In her hand, she held a knife, pointed towards the ground - blood dripped from the blade, forming the words below her.

Abigail trembled as she closed the tome, dragged it off the floor, and clutched it to her chest.

Across the river of death, Mischa extended her arm to Abigail, offering her hand in understanding. Mischa had found Abigail across the endless expanse of time, and read her thoughts. It was beyond explanation, beyond her comprehension. Through her drawings and words, Mischa strived to weave herself back into Abigail's being.

The first Mischa that Abigail had met was false - a crude creation. This time was different. Now, she felt as though she were looking through a mirror, at a version of herself the same and different. This time, there was no intermediary - Mischa spoke directly through the glass to her.

Become someone else.

"I don't want to lose myself again," Abigail spoke aloud.

Beside her, Mischa cocked her head in understanding. Her dark eyes glinted with warmth.

"I understand. You won't have to," she said.

Mischa was not pure air and lightness, as Hannibal had tried to recreate her - she carried darkness as well. She understood it deeply - and she could help Abigail shoulder its burden.

Abigail reached out - but Mischa was just beyond her the grasp of her fingers. Nevertheless, she was solid, whole. She could stand beside Abigail, taking over when the weight threatened to crush her.

Mischa looked down at the papers still strewn on the ground. A sadness passed over her eyes. She bent down and helped Abigail finish picking them up, journals and letters once again organized on her desk.

The portraits had fallen open, and Mischa gathered them up. She frowned at the painting of her brother.

“It really doesn’t do him justice, does it?” She sighed, rolling the portrait up again. “I tried, at least. His is much better.”

She handed the canvas to Abigail, who moved to place them in her closet.

“I disagree - but I’ve never seen him like that. He looks more alive in that portrait than he does now, in person.”

Mischa wandered from the room, and Abigail followed her to the kitchen. She spoke distractedly over her shoulder as she inspected the contents of the cabinets.

“He was never a gentle soul - but he wasn’t always so cruel. Ah! Here we go,” she said, pulling two wine glasses from the cabinet, along with a bottle of red wine. “Now for some music.”

Mischa set the wine and glasses on the counter as she turned on Abigail’s radio, sifting through the static to find the station she wanted. The haunting melody of one of Chopin’s Nocturnes soon filled the room. Abigail poured wine into the glasses, handing one to Mischa as she returned.

Mischa held her glass in the air.

“A toast. To being reunited - with the sister I always wanted, and never had,” she said.

Abigail mimicked her stance, then drank deeply, closing her eyes. The bitter liquid rolled over her tongue, spilled down her throat.

When she lowered the glass, Mischa was gone - the second glass still sat on the counter, half full. She let the music play, savoring each note, and leaned against the counter.

She did not have to share Mischa with Hannibal any longer. Her words, her drawings, her thoughts and feelings - Abigail had found them, and Mischa would be her companion, her sole confidante. She would carry Mischa in her heart - no man could come between them now.

Already, Abigail felt lighter.

Next chapter: Will drops in on Abigail to discuss Hannibal and Clarice's relationship, and his course of action.

Here are the full poems by Sylvia Plath, which I definitely recommend: [Lady Lazarus](#) and [Daddy](#)

Thanks for reading! With the second season imminent, if you want someone to geek out with find me on tumblr: katieofthelake.tumblr.com SO EXCITED

Lyrics by Neko Case, Furnace Room Lullaby.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!